Kassia the Nun in Context

The Religious Thought of a Ninth-Century Byzantine Monastic

Kurt Sherry

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Figure 1: St. Kassiani the Hymnographer. Holy Monastery of the Dormition of the Theotokos, Parnes, Athens, Greece. Aperges and Co. Iconographic Publishing House....6

PREFACE

I did not set out to undertake a comprehensive study of Kassia the Nun and her works. I was simply looking for a topic that would correlate my own research interests with those of my graduate advisor, Kris Utterback, so I decided to look into female monasticism in the Byzantine era. In my initial work in the area, the name Kassia (usually associated with adjectives such as "bitter" or "caustic") kept appearing. I confess that my knowledge of her was limited to the masterpiece, the Hymn of Kassiani, so it seemed unfair that she should receive no more attention from scholars than a single line, and usually a less-than-flattering one at that. What follows is an attempt to consider Kassia and her works in their context and with an eye to their intellectual significance for us today.

I naïvely thought adapting my graduate work for a book would be a simple matter. In the process, I found that I had to remove significant sections and I discovered that I needed to write two new chapters: "Kassia the Monastic" and "Kassia the Person." Such work has had its rewards, though. Through the whole process, I have gotten to know St. Kassiani in a way that I would never have thought possible and I even like her (though I'm not sure the feeling is mutual): she is profound, witty, and downright feisty. May this volume introduce her to you.

Kurt Sherry
Mead's Corner, Wichita, Kansas
March 21, 2011

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Scholars in medieval studies tend to be quite generous and I am deeply indebted to a great many of them. Space does not allow me to thank them all individually. I owe a great deal of gratitude to the many people on the Byzantine Studies listserv who offered their aid when I struggled with passages in Greek; a few who stand out are Catharine Roth, George Baloglou, Andrew White, and John Burke. Similarly, there have been many scholars over the years who generously helped me find sources, but I must thank Diane Touliatos specifically for her generosity.

ABBREVIATIONS

BF	Byzantinischen Forschungen
BZ	Byzantinische Zeitschrift
DOP	Dumbarton Oaks Papers
OCA	Orientalia Christiana Analecta
PG	Patrologiae Graecae (J.-P. Migne, Paris, 1857-1866)

INTRODUCTION

> There is absolutely no cure for stupidity
>
> nor help except for death.
>
> A stupid person when honored is arrogant towards everyone,
>
> and when praised becomes even more over-confident.
>
> Kassia the Nun, "On Stupidity"

Writers interested in the history of women in Byzantium frequently mention the name of Kassia the Nun. Best known for her haunting Holy Week *doxastikon*, "Lord, the woman in many sins," popularly known as the "Hymn of Kassiani," Kassia is among the most prominent female voices in the Byzantine world. Nonetheless, there have been few studies devoted specifically to her. Although she also composed gnomic poetry, Kassia's reputation rests upon the profound piety and subtle expression of her liturgical hymns. She is the only woman whose works were incorporated into the official Byzantine hymnals, still in use to the present day. The fourteenth-century writer Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos ranked her eleventh on his list of the most influential composers.[1]

The present work represents the first attempt at a comprehensive study of Kassia's works as expressions of ninth-century Byzantine theology. Although they conform to the prescribed norms of

[1] In listing the important hymnographers of the Iconoclast era, Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon note nine men—including Michael Sygkellos, who wrote but one hymn—and yet they *omit* Kassia. *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca 680-850): The Sources* (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001).

Byzantine religious writing, her compositions also offer profound reflection on the important theological issues of the ninth century. The subtlety of her thought makes her not only a great hymnographer, but truly a philosopher as well (and one of the few women philosophers whose ideas were preserved in the historical record). By examining her works in context, we find that Kassia often challenged the paradigms of her era while scrupulously remaining within the bounds of Christian orthodoxy. Recognizing and appreciating this meticulous balance in her writings will expand our modern understanding of the breadth and depth of the Byzantine tradition.

This work centers on three essential themes in Kassia's life and writings: iconoclasm, feminism, and monasticism. One of the difficulties lies in treating each theme separately from the others. In the ninth century, male and female monastics were allied with laywomen in opposition to Iconoclast policies. Indeed, for Byzantine women, both the pursuit of the monastic life and also the ownership and domestic veneration of icons represented important avenues of empowerment. Kassia herself was an Iconophile partisan, a feminist philosopher, and a monastic: all three identities blend together seamlessly in her personality and her writings. By providing a brief historical overview of each of these areas (Iconoclasm, the status of Byzantine women, and monasticism), my goal is to provide readers largely unfamiliar with this period of Byzantine history with sufficient context to appreciate the nuances of Kassia's life and thought.

Chapter 1, "Kassia the Candidate," analyzes the most famous incident in Kassia's life: a tense verbal exchange with Emperor Theophilos when she was a participant in the latter's bride-show. In itself, the scene reveals a good deal about Kassia's position in society and her personality. The chapter expands beyond the incident to consider the theological ramifications of the exchange, and delves into the scholarly controversy surrounding the Byzantine source material, primarily a handful of Byzantine chronicles.

Chapter 2, "Kassia the Feminist," explores Kassia's reflections on gender, which in the context of the ninth century can be characterized as feminist. Her writings provide a truly unique opportunity to study a woman's voice as she reflects upon women's issues within the confines of Byzantine ecclesiastical writing. There are other examples of Byzantine women writing about women—Anna Komnene discusses her mother and grandmother in the *Alexiad*,

and we have foundational documents, called *typika*, written for use by women's monasteries—but Kassia's gnomic verse, i.e., non-liturgical poetry, often strikes a philosophical tone, and she represents the lone female voice in the Byzantine liturgical corpus. Her writings cast considerable light on the relationship between Byzantine women and the Church, and also challenge some modern assumptions about religious justifications of female inferiority in Byzantium.

Chapter 3 establishes Kassia as an Iconophile theologian. She often employs traditional religious rhetoric in her hymns, but the theological context of the Iconoclast controversy casts new light on the significance of her emphasis on the Incarnation. Chapter 4, "Kassia the Monastic," examines Kassia's approach to the major themes of monasticism as compared to other writers within the tradition such as John Climacus.

Lastly, to avert the risk of Kassia's individual character traits being eclipsed by the foregoing analytical discussion, chapter 5 considers "Kassia the Person." What do her writings reveal about the personality of this theologian-saint, for whom there is no recorded *Life*? In many ways it is her powerful personality, even more than her ideas, that makes Kassia such a compelling figure for anyone interested in Byzantine history, the lives of medieval women, and Byzantine saints.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

There is no surviving *Life* of Kassia and biographical details are difficult to ascertain. Indeed, her very name creates confusion: Byzantine-era authors use different forms including Kassia, Ikasia, Eikasia, and Kasia.[2] There are three letters written *to* her by Theodore the Studite, but no letters or sermons written *by* her. The most important sources for reconstructing Kassia's life are a handful of closely related Byzantine chronicles that mention her only in passing (see Appendix 2). Despite this paucity of detail, however,

[2] Theodore the Studite used "Kassia" and most scholars have followed this spelling. The other spellings may reflect simple scribal errors. Given the Iconoclastic context, however, "Eikasia" would be not be inappropriate, since the word means "likeness" or "image."

we can reconstruct the broad outlines of a biography that will provide context for subsequent chapters. Furthermore, we soon discover that Kassia's personality shines through clearly in her own works, in the letters of Theodore the Studite, and in the Byzantine chronicles: all point to her intelligence, education, creativity, cleverness, razor-sharp wit, and piety.

Kassia lived in Constantinople in the early ninth century. It is difficult to be more specific than that—scholars have proposed dates of birth ranging from 800 to 812.[3] The date of her death, sometime in mid-ninth century, is similarly obscure. Although a specific timeline for Kassia's life eludes us, the first half of the ninth century was highly significant in the history of Byzantium, for it marked the height of the second wave of Iconoclasm. As we will see, Kassia was as much a product of this turbulent period as she was an active participant in its struggles.

She belonged to an aristocratic family, and her father was evidently a military official (*Kandidatos*) in the imperial court. Even as a child, she was deeply religious. She offered support for an imprisoned monk who had likely defied the Iconoclast authorities, for which action the great Theodore the Studite wrote her a letter of thanks. His letters also reveal that she was already contemplating the pursuit of the monastic life from her youth.

As a young aristocrat in a society where women enjoyed a relatively high rate of literacy, Kassia received an excellent education. Her writings displayed not only compositional skill but also

[3] Ilse Rochow, *Studien zu der Person, den werken und dem Nachleben der Dichterin Kassia*, Berliner Byzantinische Arbeiten, Vol. 38 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1967), 31; "The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Among the Saints, Cassiane of Constantinople, Whose Memory the Holy Church Celebrates on the Seventh of September," *The Lives of the Spiritual Mothers: An Orthodox Materikon of Women Monastics and Ascetics*, trans. and compiled from the Greek of The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church and other sources (Buena Vista, CO: Holy Apostles Convent, 1991), 371. Both of these sources suggest Kassia was born between 800 and 805. Diane Touliatos offers the year 810; see "Kassia (ca. 810-843 and 867)" in *New Historical Anthology of Music by Women*, ed. James R. Briscoe (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 6-10. Anna Silvas dates Kassia's birth to between 810 and 812; see "Kassia the Nun c. 810-c.865: An Appreciation," in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience, 800-1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (London: Ashgate, 2006), 33.

intellectual depth. Even as a teenager, she inspired this high praise from Theodore:

> While you have not surpassed those of old, of whose wisdom and education we in this generation, both men and women, fall far short—and immeasurably so—you have done so with regard to those of the present, since the fair form of your discourse has far more beauty than a mere specious prettiness.[4]

Around the year 823, the most eligible maidens in the Byzantine Empire were brought to the palace so that the young Theophilos, whose father had recently named him co-emperor, could select a bride. Theophilos narrowed the field at his bride-show to the two most beautiful girls: Theodora of Paphlagonia and Kassia. When Theophilos approached Kassia, they had a short verbal exchange that is examined in detail in the first chapter of this book. In short order, Kassia demonstrated her wit and embarrassed the future emperor. Needless to say, he married Theodora instead. Some of Kassia's compositions, presumably from a later period of her life, seem to deride both Theophilos and Theodora.

Sometime after the bride-show, Kassia fulfilled her childhood dream and became a nun. Like many aristocratic Byzantine women, Kassia founded her own monastery in Constantinople and served as the community's abbess. At this point she most likely acquired the name by which she is known in popular tradition: Kassiani.[5] She spent the rest of her life in her monastery "philosophizing," according to the chronicler Leo the Grammarian; in Byzantine Greek, the term denotes any type of intellectual activity and was also applied to monasticism. It seems likely that her surviving poems and most famous liturgical compositions date from this phase of her life.

It is not known when Kassia died, but her monastery remained active for several centuries. Although some scholars have been under the impression that the Byzantine Church never recognized

[4] *Letter* 270, in Silvas, 35.

[5] It was standard practice in the Byzantine Church for a nun's monastic name to begin with the same letter as her given name. Her monastic patron was likely the fifth-century monk John Cassian.

Kassia as a saint, they are mistaken. She is enrolled in the *synaxarion* (the catalog of saints) for September 7, and her image appears in modern Eastern Orthodox icons with a halo and the label "Saint Kassiani." (See figure 1.) She continues to speak to the Church and the faithful through her compositions, many of which were incorporated into the liturgical corpus after, or perhaps even during, her lifetime.

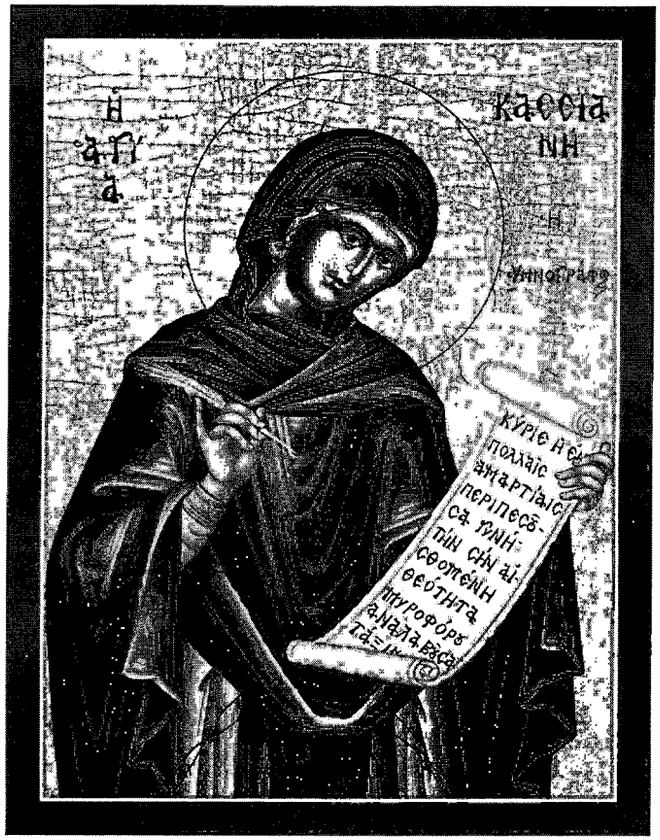

Figure 1: St. Kassiani the Hymnographer. Holy Monastery of the Dormition of the Theotokos, Parnes, Athens, Greece. Aperges and Co. Iconographic Publishing House.

KASSIA'S THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT: AUTHORITY IN THE BYZANTINE CHURCH

We cannot evaluate Kassia's standing as a ninth-century theologian without first situating her within the context of the Church and its structures of authority. The Byzantine Church was composed of a number of independent and quasi-independent churches headed by bishops. Within each ecclesial jurisdiction, bishoprics were arranged hierarchically: for example, the bishopric of Beirut was under the Patriarchate of Antioch. Similarly, the five major patriarchates themselves (Constantinople, Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem) were ranked according to honor and political influence. Although the newest of the five major sees, the patriarchate of Constantinople enjoyed effective preeminence simply because it was located in the imperial capital. However, despite the formal hierarchy, Constantinople never exerted the monolithic influence later associated in the West with the Church of Rome. Rather, it presided over an ecclesiastical confederacy in which the bishops of the local churches held equal standing. Unless otherwise stated, I use the term "Byzantine Church" to refer broadly to this confederacy of churches in communion with the Patriarchate of Constantinople that followed the Byzantine rite—thus including the Orthodox Churches in Muslim-ruled territory, for example, but excluding the Roman West, where the Latin rite prevailed.

Along with the Byzantine Church's relatively decentralized nature, external political forces—Muslim overlordship, imperial interference in Church policy, and sundry doctrinal disputes—complicate our understanding of power and authority. The present discussion, however, centers more on ideological authority than on the practical institutional power structures within the Byzantine Church. Doctrinal authority in the Byzantine Church tended to be organic and fluid, and authoritative elements frequently came into conflict. Generally speaking, "tradition" carried great weight. Unfortunately, the term is poorly defined, and most Byzantine polemicists asserted that tradition was on their side in any given theological dispute. Partisans generally referred to writings of one or more Church Fathers to support their respective positions: for example, Iconoclasts often appealed to Epiphanios of Cyprus while Iconophiles cited Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus extensively. Ultimately, theologians and clergy relied on both patristic writings

and synodal decrees—arrived at through a consensus of all the churches—as definitive.

The writings of the Fathers were opinions—authoritative ones, to be certain, but individual opinions nonetheless. Whereas in the Latin West Augustine of Hippo came to dominate all religious thought until Thomas Aquinas, the Greek- and Syriac-speaking East lists a great number of Fathers: John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Athanasius the Great, Cyril of Alexandria, Maximos the Confessor, Isaac the Syrian, and many others. Although certain Fathers were considered more authoritative than others (e.g., Gregory of Nazianzus's views carried more weight than those of Aphrahat the Persian), such an array allowed Byzantine theologians to compare the opinions of different writers and develop a range of views that were deemed acceptable. The Byzantine Church rejected certain opinions expressed by Church Fathers—Augustine's notions of Original Sin and predestination, or Gregory of Nazianzus' advocacy of praying for Satan—as being at odds with the patristic consensus. Only when a particular Father's statements were considered consistent with the views of the Fathers as a whole were they accepted as truly authoritative.

Ultimately, the Byzantine Church relied on councils to formulate virtually all its dogmatic pronouncements. Given the extent to which the writings of the Church Fathers influenced the bishops at these councils, one could characterize the councils as "collegial interpretations" of the Church Fathers as a whole. Like all else in the Byzantine world, councils were ranked hierarchically. So-called "ecumenical" councils carried greater authority than local ones. An ecumenical council required representation from throughout the Christian world—at least in theory. Ecumenicity could be challenged if entire portions of Christendom rejected certain councils, as when the Persian, Indian, Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, and Syriac churches rejected the fifth-century Council of Chalcedon, which caused the Byzantine Church to splinter during the era of the Nestorian and Monophysite controversies. A council could also be rejected by the laity even though the bishops supported it, as was later the case with the 1437 Council of Florence-Florina, which was supposed to effect reunion between the Byzantine and Latin Churches.

While acknowledging the importance of these types of formal authority, I propose another type of authoritative source that encapsulates the "official" thinking of the Church: liturgical material. Liturgical expressions, especially hymnody, were far more readily accessible to the faithful, both lay and ecclesiastic, than were theological writings. In a population with significant illiteracy, for whom books themselves were luxury items, the writings of the Church Fathers would have been difficult to obtain and analyze. The Church's hymns, by contrast, were part of the ordinary, day-to-day experience of the Byzantines. Although Tillyard notes that Byzantine liturgical language became increasingly divorced from the vernacular, claims as to its incomprehensibility may be overstated.[6] Those who could read usually learned directly from the Psalter, which was translated into early koine Greek. By attending church services regularly, one heard many phrases and certain hymns repeated Sunday after Sunday, and year after year. This familiarity surely enhanced the ability of the faithful to grasp the content and theological messages of the services.[7] We can reasonably speculate that the Byzantines' comprehension of the services was roughly analogous to that of a modern American audience's understanding of a Shakespeare production, perhaps even better.

Byzantine hymns are rich in dogmatic content. Many hymns were ascribed to theologians counted among the Church Fathers: Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, and John of Damascus, among others. References and quotations from patristic sources also recur in later Byzantine hymnography, beginning particularly with the canon-writers of the eighth and ninth centuries.[8] The liturgical hymns of the Byzantine Church incorporated the dogmatic proclamations of the great councils: for example, the Divine Liturgies of the Byzantine Church featured the recitation of the Nicene-

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[6] H. J. W. Tillyard, *Byzantine Music and Hymnography* (London: The Faith Press, 1923), 22.

[7] Even today, speakers of modern Greek, which is much further removed from ancient and liturgical Greek than was Byzantine vernacular Greek, are able to comprehend remarkable amounts of the liturgical material.

[8] Peter Karavites, "Gregory Nazianzus and Byzantine Hymnography," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 113 (1993), 81-98.

Constantinopolitan Creed by the laity. Hymnographers also included references to conciliar doctrines. Andrew of Crete directly expressed the Trinitarian formulation of the Council of Chalcedon in a *doxastikon* of his Great Canon: "'I am the Trinity, simple and undivided, yet divided in Persons, and I am the Unity, by Nature one,' says the Father and the Son and the divine Spirit."[9] Other hymnographers praised the Fathers of individual councils and even enshrined conciliar condemnations, a feature peculiar to Byzantine hymnography.[10] In short, the hymns of the Byzantine Church, especially those written between 500 and the fall of Constantinople to the Latins in 1204, offer a rich and much-neglected source for investigating Byzantine theology.[11] In a very real sense, the ultimate confirmation of the theology propounded by the Church Fathers and the Councils took place when the Church's hymnography made it accessible to the laity.

Byzantine liturgical books were compiled over a long period of time, according to a complex process that went largely undocumented. John Chrysostom and Basil the Great began editing the Divine Liturgy in the fourth century. Certain hymn forms developed earlier than others: the *kontakion* arose in the sixth century and the canon was a product of the eighth. John of Damascus probably began compiling and standardizing liturgical material in the 700s. In addition to writing many hymns—most notably the funeral service still in use in the Eastern Orthodox Church—he is credited with compiling the *Oktoechos* (the Book of the Eight Tones) and the *Pareklitiki*.[12]

[9] Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware, eds. and trans., *The Lenten Triodion* (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2002), 203.

[10] Ephrem (Lash), "Byzantine Hymns of Hate," in *Byzantine Orthodoxies: Papers from the Thirty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Durham, 23-25 March 2002*, ed. Andrew Louth and Augustine Casiday (London: Ashgate, 2006), 151-64.

[11] Alexander Schmemann, *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*, trans. Lydia W. Kesich (New York, Chicago and San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 196, 229; Hugh Wybrew, *Orthodox Lent, Holy Week and Easter: Liturgical Texts with Commentary* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 3.

[12] Ibid., 227.

Significantly for the present study, the monastery of Studion in Constantinople was at the center of the next stage of liturgical consolidation and compilation. Ninth-century hymnographers such as Kassia, an informal member of the Studite network, contributed new forms such as the *sticheron*, a hymn that was interspersed with verses from the Psalms. The Studites dominated the process of compilation and editing through the Middle Byzantine period, from the end of Iconoclasm in 843 until 1204. They incorporated their new hymns into the liturgical structure of the Church's services and compiled the main hymnals, i.e., the *Triodion*, *Pentekostarion* and *Menaion*, still in use today in the Orthodox Church. The Studites further developed the *Typikon* (roughly equivalent to the Latin Ordo; and not to be confused with the *typikon* or rule of an individual monastery) that continues to guide the practices of the Church in modern times.

This long and dynamic process was essentially populist since the Studites, although influential, were distinct from and often at odds with the upper clergy. Studite compilers made editorial decisions by omitting certain hymns and including others. Those incorporated into the liturgical cycle, therefore, most accurately reflect the consensus opinion of the Byzantine Church. Thus, Church hymnography offers a more reliable source than either the writings of the Church Fathers or saint's *Lives* for understanding the corporate thought of the Byzantine Church.

The above discussion may strike the reader as a digression from the topic of the present work, but it is critical to recognizing the context for, and importance of, Kassia's surviving literary works. Kassia's writings are universally poetic, and many are *stichera* with a specifically liturgical function. The very fact that the compilers of the *Triodion* and *Menaion* incorporated her liturgical works (with the notable exception of her canon for the dead) indicates a tacit blessing and confirmation of her theological ideas by the Church. Indeed, on this basis, I contend that Kassia's works should be placed in the same category as those of the Church Fathers who were her approximate contemporaries: John of Damascus, Photios the Great, and Theodore the Studite, her own spiritual father.

In recent years, it has become fashionable to speak of the "Fathers *and Mothers* of the Church." However, while one can readily identify significant female saints from the early years of Byzantium—for example, Macrina the Younger profoundly

influenced her brothers, the renowned theologians Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa—it is a much greater challenge to identify a woman theologian in her own right. The sayings of the fourth-century Desert Mothers Sarah, Synkletiki, and Theodosia were recorded along with those of their male contemporaries, but none left a body of writings. Kassia's written legacy of hymnography and its theological content place her, as a Church Mother, on par with those counted as Fathers.

A NOTE ABOUT SOURCES

Among the primary sources, we can glean some information about Kassia from a handful of Byzantine-era chronicles, which appear in Appendix 2 in parallel Greek and English texts. The three letters written to Kassia by Theodore the Studite are also available to us in English translation.

Karl Krumbacher, writing in German in the late 1800s, was the first modern scholar to undertake a study of Kassia. Sophrone Pétridès produced an article in French a few years later. The most comprehensive scholarly work on the subject to date is Ilse Rochow's 1967 *Studien zu der Person, den Werken und dem Nachleben der Dichterin Kassia.* A handful of English-speaking scholars have made more recent forays: Eva Catafoyiotu Topping wrote two articles in the 1980s, Diane Touliatos produced several musicological studies, and Anna Silvas penned an "appreciation" that includes an appendix with translations of Theodore the Studite's correspondence. Tatiana Sénina (now the nun Kassiani) wrote several recent articles (and a novel) in Russian, and one in French.

Most important among the contributions to English scholarship on Kassia is Antonía Tripolitis's critical translation of Kassia's writings, including her non-liturgical poems and epigrams. In general, I have gratefully followed Tripolitis's translations, with occasional minor adaptations. For two poems, "On Monastics" (Περὶ μοναχῶν) and "What is a Monastic?" (Τί εἶναι μοναχὸς;), I offer new translations that better reflect the nuances of Kassia's philosophy of monasticism. (See Appendix 1.)

Tripolitis includes forty-nine hymns in her translation of Kassia's works. Scholars are reasonably certain of Kassia's authorship for twenty-three of them. Various manuscripts attribute the remaining twenty-six to any of a number of other authors, or frequently to none at all.[13] Such inconsistencies come as no great surprise—hymnographic texts survived because copyists included them in liturgical books, whose purpose was to furnish chanters with the texts of Church hymns, not to protect intellectual property. Touliatos, however, suggests that the confusion surrounding Kassia's authorship may reflect misogynistic attitudes on the part of scribes and copyists.[14] Claudia Rapp raises another possibility with this important caveat: "Modern scholars seem inclined to accept Kassia's authorship of hymns [for women saints] simply because she was a woman herself," which suggests that some false attributions *to* Kassia actually may have resulted from Byzantine copyists making that very assumption.[15] While it is unlikely that authorship of every hymn will ever be determined with certainty, I have chosen to follow Tripolitis and assume that all forty-nine known compositions genuinely belong to Kassia.

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[13] Diane Touliatos includes a very useful table indicating which hymns are genuine and which are doubtful in origin, with manuscript references and variant attributions; see her "Kassia (ca. 810-between 843 and 867)," in *Women Composers: Music Through the Ages*, vol. 1, ed. Martha Furman Schleifer and Sylvia Glickman (New York: G.K. Hall, 1996), 7-10.

[14] Touliatos, "Kassia (ca. 810-between 843 and 867)," 3.

[15] Claudia Rapp, "Figures of Female Sanctity: Byzantine Edifying Manuscripts and Their Audience," DOP 50 (1996), 328.

1 KASSIA THE CANDIDATE

> She gave Theophilos a golden apple saying that he should give it to her who pleased him. There was among them a noble maiden named Ikasia, who was altogether beautiful. Beholding her, he was smitten. . . .
>
> Leo the Grammarian, *Chronographia*

The title of this chapter contains a bit of wordplay. On the one hand, Theodore the Studite addressed Kassia, as the daughter of a prominent Byzantine official, by the title *Kandidatissa.* However, the term also recalls Kassia's role in the best-known vignette of her life: the bride-show of the Emperor Theophilos, the last Iconoclast emperor. The contemporary Byzantine chroniclers who mention her at all do so in the context of this event. Popular legend later transformed the bride-show into the starting point of an improbable romance, and even gave Theophilos credit for two lines of Kassia's most famous hymn.

According to a chronicle written under the name Symeon the Logothete, the emperor's stepmother, Euphrosyne, arranged the bride-show in 823 in order to marry off the young Theophilos.[16] Euphrosyne gave Theophilos a golden apple, telling him to bestow

[16] PG 109:685C. Nearly identical accounts are given in George the Monk's *Chronikon* (PG 110:1008B); Leo the Grammarian's *Chronographia* (PG 108:1046A-B); John Zonaras' *Chronikon*, in Rochow, 7-8; and Michael Glykas' *Chronographia*, in Rochow, 8. See Appendix 2.

it on the girl he wished to marry. According to the chroniclers, Theophilos narrowed the field to two girls: Kassia and Theodora. Smitten by her beauty, Theophilos approached Kassia and a short verbal sparring match ensued. Embarrassed, Theophilos chose to marry Theodora instead.

The bride-show account has been a subject of enough scholarly controversy to merit further analysis. Scholars have debated Kassia's very presence at the bride-show, as well as the veracity of her supposed exchange with the young emperor. In general, the ecclesiastical sources, along with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers such as Gibbon and Krumbacher tended to accept the story at face value; twentieth-century scholars through the 1970s, e.g., Rochow, Lebeaur, Schlosser, Treadgold, and Lambros, tended to reject it. More recent scholars generally agree that a critical analysis of the available sources tends to support the story at least in part. Complicating matters, however, is the fact that the bride-show is reported in Byzantine chronicles considered more literary than historical in nature.[17]

The reported wording of the famous exchange between Kassia and Theophilos offers some textual clues that point to Kassia as its source. The text of Symeon's tenth-century *Chronographia* reads:

> Ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς Θεόφιλος τῷ κάλλει τῆς Εἰκασίας ἐκπλαγεὶς ἔφη, ὡς Ἄρα διὰ γυναικὸς ἐῤῥύη τὰ φαῦλα. Ἡ δὲ μετ' αἰδοῦς πως ἀντέφησεν · Ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ γυναικός πηγάζει τὰ κρείττονα.
>
> The emperor Theophilos said to the astounded Kassia, "Through a woman trickled forth the baser things." With modesty, she retorted, "But also through a woman gush forth the better things."

Skeptics of the bride-show's plausibility question the validity of this exchange based on the fact that it does not appear in the

[17] Martha Vinson offers a thought-provoking analysis of the bride-show motif in "Romance and Reality in the Byzantine Bride Shows" in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M.H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 102-120.

chronicles until nearly a century after the alleged event.[18] However, in addition to Symeon the Logothete, the chroniclers George the Monk and Leo the Grammarian, who wrote slightly later than Symeon, used similar wording in recounting the exchange, which suggests a common source. I would suggest that this common source is Kassia herself, since the exchange bears several hallmarks of her other known writing.

Kassia often wrote gnomic couplets that employed incongruous word-pairs. In this exchange, there are two such pairs: "trickled" (ἐῤῥύη) vs. "gushes" (πηγάζει) and "the baser things" (τὰ φαῦλα) vs. "the better things" (τὰ κρείττονα). Furthermore, in this exchange tense of the verb ἐῤῥύη indicates that the action of "trickling" is something in the past; by contrast, πηγάζει (gushes) is in present tense, suggesting that the action remains ongoing, i.e., the Virgin Mary's giving forth of the "better things" continues, although her giving birth to Christ was clearly limited to a single historical event. A similar contrast in verb tenses appears in Kassia's hymn "When Augustus reigned," with the different tenses serving to differentiate the finite and temporal reign of the Roman emperor from the infinite and eternal reign of Christ. These parallels with Kassia's known work reinforce the likelihood that she authored the original source material for the exchange.

The purported bride-show exchange also contains a theological subtext that further marks it as the work of a Byzantine theologian and hymnographer such as Kassia. Unfortunately, published translations to date of this exchange in English and German have failed to capture these theological subtleties. Topping provides one of the better translations: "Overwhelmed by Kassia's beauty, Emperor Theophilos said: 'From woman come evils.' She replied,

[18] Some authors have pointed out the story's absence in slightly earlier works including the *Life of Theodora* and *The Chronicle of Theophanes*; for the latter, see trans. Harry Turtledove (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982). However, the absence of the exchange from two known sources does not prove that it is false, only that the exchange was either unfamiliar to those authors or deemed irrelevant to their purposes. Indeed, Vinson's treatment of the bride-shows fails to account for other considerable discrepancies between the accounts of the tenth-century chronicles and the *Life of Theodora*.

though with modesty: 'But from woman spring many blessings.'"[19] This translation demonstrates an error common to all the translations: it renders τὰ φαῦλα (*ta phaula*) as "evils" and τὰ κρείττονα (*ta kreittona*) as "blessings." However, in standard Byzantine Greek usage, including the writings of Kassia herself, the word commonly used for "evil" was τὸ κακόν (*kakon*), not τὸ φαύλον; similarly, "blessings" was commonly expressed by τὰ μακαρία (*makaria*). More accurately, τὰ φαῦλα and τὰ κρείττονα may be translated as "the baser things" and "the better things," respectively.[20]

The problem with Topping's translation—and those by other scholars[21]—is not merely its inaccuracy, but also its failure to capture the theological sophistication of the exchange itself. Simply put, the existing renderings refer indirectly to the Augustinian paradigm of Original Sin, which was dominant in the Western Church. By contrast, the Eastern Church never spoke in terms of inherited guilt or essential moral depravity. Rather, it linked the Fall to the coming of death and corruption and to a devolution of humanity—a return to a more bestial state, designated in patristic texts by the term "the passions."[22] Given such a theological backdrop, we can

[19] Eva Catafygiotu Topping, "Kassiane the Nun and the Sinful Woman," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 26 (1981), 204.

[20] *Ta phaula* (τὰ φαῦλα) also has a somewhat more subtle implication of things that are "trashy."

[21] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Hooper, Clarke and Co., 1886), 204. In "A Musical Study of the Hymns of Casia," *BZ* 20 (1911), 421, Tillyard reported it as "the prince could only observe, 'Women had been the occasion of much evil:' 'And surely, Sir,' she pertly replied, 'they have that in this likewise been the occasion of much good.'" Karl Krumbacher offered this wording (my translation from the German): "Bewitched by her charm, Theophilos walked to her with the words: 'Through the woman sprang evil.' Hereupon the young woman replied with modesty: 'But out of the woman sprouts also the good.'" Karl Krumbacher, *Kasia* (Munich: Verlage der K.B. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1897), 312.

[22] In "The Life and Struggles of Our Holy Mother Among the Saints, Cassiane," 372, the Holy Apostles Convent editors offer a translation that better reflects Byzantine theology: "[Theophilos] went up to her, and said, 'From woman flowed corruption' (meaning the fall of Eve). Then the most wise Cassiane, modestly blushing, answered Theophilos, saying, 'But also from woman sprung forth what is superior' (meaning the Theotokos gave birth to God in the flesh). At the over-boldness and wisdom of Cassiane, he was tongue-tied and withdrew from her."

conclude that τὰ φαῦla refers to the consequences of the sin (corruption, death and the passions) and not to evil per se.

The use of τὰ κρείττονα (the better things) is significant in several ways. Being plural, the term cannot refer to Christ Himself.[23] Instead, it refers to good things coming from the "woman" in question, i.e., the Virgin Mary (Theotokos). In other words, Kassia is referring to those "better things," i.e., the *consequences* for the human race, that resulted from the Virgin giving birth to God, rather than to any specific "blessings" (τὰ μακαρία) bestowed by Christ Himself. Moreover, by using this term, Kassia philosophizes about the impact of the Incarnation on human nature, i.e., the development of the virtues ("better things") to counteract the passions ("baser things").[24] The dialogue thus demonstrates Kassia's theological sophistication as well as her wit.

While the literary nature and late date of the chronicles warrants caution, other sources suggest that there is some truth to the bride-show story. When Theodore the Studite addresses Kassia as *Kandidatissa*, it demonstrates her family's social rank, since a *kandidatos* was a high-ranking military official in the Byzantine court. Presumably, the term refers to her father rather than to a husband, since Theodore also calls her "maiden." We may reasonably suppose, then, that Kassia, as a young, eligible woman of noble rank, would have been present at Theophilos's bride-show. Since most scholars assume that the choice of bride was arranged beforehand, her participation may have been for the purpose of maintaining appearances, rather than as a legitimate candidate. Should we, therefore, reject the dialogue as spurious legend?[25]

[23] Significantly, the fourteenth-century chronicler Ephraim the Monk changed τὰ κρείττονα to the singular βελτίω, indicating Christ; available in Greek in Rochow, 8-9. See my Appendix 2 for an English translation.

[24] On the significance of the Incarnation in Kassia's theology, see Chapter 3, "Kassia the Iconophile."

[25] Scholars have been unable to definitively date either Theophilos's bride-show or Kassia's birth. How one reconciles these issues impacts calculations of the likelihood of Kassia's presence at the bride-show.

Kassia's poem "On Stupidity" may well refer to the young Theophilos's failed attempt at cleverness:[26]

> It is terrible for a stupid person to possess some knowledge;
> and if he has an opinion, it's even worse;
> but if a stupid man is young and in a position of power,
> alas and woe and what a disaster.
> Woe, O Lord, if a stupid person attempts to be clever;
> where does one flee, where does one turn, how does one endure?[27]

Such a reading strongly suggests that the two did, in fact, have an unpleasant exchange at the bride-show. Another provocative piece of evidence appears in the last of Theodore the Studite's letters to Kassia. In the process of defending himself against some accusation by Kassia, he wrote, "just as they do who hurl simply and without proof those accusations against you—and they too who are among your nearest and dearest."[28] Unfortunately, none of Kassia's letters to Theodore survived, so we know neither the nature of her complaint against him nor the accusations that her own family was leveling at her. It is not unreasonable to conjecture that Kassia's family may have accused her of sabotaging her marriage prospects to the emperor, especially in light of the fact that Theodore's earlier letters indicate that she had monastic intentions from her childhood.

Ultimately, we can conclude that Theophilos' bride-show really happened, that Kassia was probably present, and that she and Theophilos had a tense exchange, whatever the precise words may have been. Although it seems unlikely that the dialogue as recorded represents the actual wording of their exchange, it is certainly consonant with Kassia's personality and theological perspective. Her response demonstrates both wit and intelligence. Equally important

[26] Silvas, 25, suggests that this poem refers to the reign of Theophilos's young son Michael III, but the reference to the "stupid one attempting to be clever" is rather highly suggestive of Theophilos.

[27] Antonía Tripolitis, ed. and trans., *Kassia: The Legend, the Woman and Her Work*, Garland Library of Medieval Literature, Vol. 84, Series A (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), 125.

[28] *Letter II* 205, Silvas, 36.

for understanding her as a "Mother of the Church," the exchange provides a glimpse into the theological depth and the self-confident, even forceful, defense of orthodoxy and of her sex that typify her compositions.

2 KASSIA THE FEMINIST

> He who once hid the pursuing tyrant in the waves of the sea,
> was hidden beneath the earth by the children He had saved.
> But let us, as the maidens, sing unto the Lord, for He is greatly glorified.
>
> Kassia, Tetraodion Canon of Holy Saturday

Describing a ninth-century nun as a feminist philosopher may strike modern readers as rather jarring. The term "feminist" tends to conjure images inapplicable to the pre-modern world. However, Kassia's poems and hymns clearly speak to a variety of issues that directly concern women. Particularly in her poetry, she reflects philosophically on the nature of gender and its function in Byzantine society. Furthermore, Kassia's bold reply to Theophilos at the bride-show suggests a feminist outlook—one has made her an icon of sorts for modern feminists who seek champions for women's rights within the Byzantine Church.

Nevertheless, we might be tempted to dismiss Kassia's views on women as an aberration. Certainly, she is one of the few surviving female voices from the Byzantine era, and we find little evidence that she was a social rebel. Her theological views fall well within the confines of Church tradition, as attested by the inclusion of many of her works in the Byzantine hymnals and her glorification as a saint.[29] However, Byzantine views on gender reflected the uneasy tension between Byzantium's classical inheritance and its

[29] The inclusion of her liturgical works was complicated by the fact that she was a woman. Nikeporos Kallistos Xanthopoulos ranked her last on his list of the eleven most-influential hymnographers (Tripolitis, ii), and Mark of Venice partially wrote a new Canon of Holy Saturday because some thought it inappropriate to use a hymn written by a woman.

Christian ideals. The Byzantines were generally patriarchal, even misogynistic; they considered women to be the biological, intellectual, and moral inferiors of men. Within this context, Kassia clearly defied, or at least intellectually challenged, the norms of Byzantine society regarding women.

Kassia was able to strike an almost defiant tone in her actions and writings in part because of the unique intersection of gender and religion in Byzantium. We know about her and her works largely through a combination of timing and social connections—in other words, through historical accident. The Iconoclast controversy took place within a religious-political arena in which women were particularly active agents. Moreover, Kassia's position as a monastic within the famous Studite network enabled some of her works to survive while those of contemporary women disappeared.[30] In short, ninth-century Byzantine Christianity created an environment conducive to female empowerment, albeit one limited in scope.

In defining gender roles, Byzantines operated from medical paradigms inherited from the Greco-Roman world.[31] The gynecology of early Greek and Roman doctors strikes modern readers as somewhere between ridiculous and offensive. Existing patterns of female social inferiority naturally informed the assumptions of ancient medicine. In the Greco-Roman medical corpus, we find culturally based definitions of "normality," "health," "illness," and

[30] There are few extant writings of known women from the Byzantine era. Besides Kassia, the only known female hymnographer was a nun named Thekla, and her works have not survived. Other famous women monastics surely must have been writers as well. For example, although the *Life* of Irene Chrysovalantou indicates that she preached, her sermons are lost.

[31] For the reader unfamiliar with this fact, the Byzantines never saw a break between their society and the classical world. They called themselves Romans and maintained many Roman forms in their governmental organization. Their contemporaries generally referred to them as Romans, unless they intended insult. In fact, the term "Greek" was considered insulting as it implied a non-Christian culture. On Kassia and charges of "Hellenism," see Tatiana A. Sénina (moniale Kassia), "Notices sur L'atmosphère Intellectuelle À L'époque du Second Iconoclasme," *Scrinum* 4 (2008), 318-40, especially 339-40.

so on.[32] Drawing on Greek philosophical tradition, male and female are often juxtaposed dichotomously—in effect, defining male as "normal" and female as "abnormal" and inferior.[33] Galen, whose commentaries on Hippocrates continued to be highly influential on Byzantine medicine as late as the twelfth century, described women as "imperfect, and, as it were, mutilated."[34] In short, according to the classical inheritance of the Byzantines on the issue of female biology, women were fundamentally flawed human beings, a fact used to explain everything from menstruation to supposed female sexual wantonness.[35]

The bride-show exchange provides the most striking example of Kassia's defiance of these misogynistic presuppositions. When Theophilos remarks, "through a woman, the baser things trickled forth," he refers to Eve, but he also invokes the Hellenistic assumption that women were fundamentally flawed and inferior. By contrast, Kassia's reply—"through a woman, the better things gush forth"—more accurately reflects sound Byzantine theology. By invoking the Mother of God, Kassia accomplishes more than a minor triumph in a verbal sparring match with the emperor. She expresses a key theological tenet: that through the Incarnation—accomplished by the agency of the Virgin Mary—all of nature is

[32] Helen King, "Producing Woman: Hippocratic Gynaecology," in *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion of the Night* ed. Léonie J. Archer, Susan Fischler and Maria Wyke (New York: Routledge, 1994), 105.

[33] Ibid., 106-7.

[34] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 10.

[35] Averil Cameron, "Early Christianity and the Discourse of Female Desire," in *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion of the Night* ed. Léonie J. Archer, Susan Fischler, and Maria Wyke (New York: Routledge, 1994), 153-6; Talbot, "Women," in *The Byzantines*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 117-18; Helen King, "Bound to Bleed: Artemis and Greek Women," in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 110-11. Despite the obvious misogyny, the Byzantines did provide medical care for women that included female doctors, nurses, and orderlies. See Peter Charanis, "The Monk as an Element of Society," DOP 25 (1971), 82-3; Talbot, "Women," 124-5, 131; and Carolyn L. Connor, *Women of Byzantium* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 264-5.

renewed, so that whatever flaws and weaknesses existed in human nature (and in women in particular) have been strengthened by grace.[36]

The juxtaposition of Eve and the Theotokos is a common literary device found in Byzantine hymnography and in the writings of the Church Fathers. Virtually every modern scholar examining the figure of Eve relies heavily on Western paradigms, asserting that Byzantine theologians believed Eve to be tainted with Original Sin. As a result, *all* women were sinful. Talbot's comments are typical of this perspective:

> The attitude of Byzantines toward female saints reflects their general ambivalence about women: they were torn between the Old Testament statement that God made humankind, both male and female, in His image (Gen 1:27), and the portrayal of Eve as causing Original Sin by succumbing to the temptation of the serpent (Gen 3).[37]

Talbot is correct about the Byzantine ambivalence toward women; however, she misidentifies its source within the Byzantine world. The Byzantine Church never adopted the doctrine of Original Sin, an essentially Augustinian construct that flourished mainly in the Latin West. (When John Cassian, for example, expressed views on free will and salvation that reflected the Byzantine conceptions of the Fall, Latin theologians accused him of being "semi-Pelagian.") Scholars who rely on Latin Fathers such as Tertullian, Augustine, and Jerome to support their arguments overlook the fact that these writers had little influence in the Greek-speaking world.[38]

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[36] Given the religio-political context of ninth-century Byzantium and the fact that Kassia and Theophilos were in opposing camps, there seem to be significant overtones—a reference to the Incarnation and a disagreement about the role of women—in the particulars of this exchange.

[37] Alice-Mary Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996), x; cp. Talbot, "Women," 117; cf. Connor, 16.

[38] The Eastern Fathers tended to emphasize consequential mortality and corruptibility rather than inherent moral defect and generally used the term the "Transgression" rather than "Fall." Typical are the comments of Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 1 and Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 12.15

Many of the great Eastern Fathers in fact affirmed the equality of women, and often objected to the double standards applied by Hellenistic society.[39] They recognized that negative images of women derived from long-standing social customs and ideas inherited from antiquity, rather from Christianity. Although a perusal of the early Church Fathers reveals that they, too, viewed Eve in generally negative terms, they seldom characterized women in general with that same negativity.[40] Instead, the tendency is for the Eastern Fathers to either discuss Eve as an individual, or to extend their comments to include all of humanity.

There are three important trends concerning the treatment of the Fall of Adam and Eve in the Eastern sources. The first trend concerns the "problem" for which the Eastern Fathers and Byzantine hymnographers sought to assign blame. Generally, they viewed Eve's actions as ushering in not "evil," but rather corruption and death.[41] A second, related trend is that they depicted Eve as a victim of Satan's deception. Ephraim the Syrian stated clearly that Eve's simplicity was the cause of her victimization: "Eve will cease from that serpent and rail at thee: for thou, O Dragon, wast he that beguiled her simpleness."[42] Adam often receives equal or even sole

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[39] G.H. Ettlinger discusses this in greater detail in "Θεός δὲ οὐχ οὕτως (Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* XXXVII): The Dignity of the Human Person According to the Greek Fathers," *Studia Patristica* 16 (Berlin: 1985), 368-72.

[40] Notable exceptions include Aphrahat the Persian, *Demonstrations* 6.2-3; John Chrysostom, *Homily* 9 *on* 1 *Timothy*; Clement of Alexandria, *Fragments*, 3.3; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 4.30.

[41] It is precisely this fact that makes the usual translation of τὰ φαῦλα as "evils" problematic. Not only is it an inaccurate translation of the word itself, it fails to account for the emphasis on corruption and death, rather than sin itself, as the result of the Transgression in Eastern theological tradition. For more on the views of the Eastern Church Fathers, see Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 12.15; Ephraim the Syrian, *Homily* 1.3; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations*, 8.14, 45.24; Gregory the Wonderworker, *Homily* 1 [On the Annunciation]; Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, 3.22.4, 4.preface.4, 5.19.1; John Chrysostom, *Homily* 3 *On the Power of Demons*, 3-4; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 100; John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4.24; Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen*, 1.

[42] Ephraim the Syrian, *The Nisibene Hymns*, 57.4.

blame for the Fall, particularly in the liturgical texts.[43] It thus appears that the Eastern Fathers did not regard women to be especially evil or flawed as the direct result of the transgression recorded in Genesis.

In contrasting a negative depiction of Eve with a positive depiction of the Virgin Mary, Kassia follows the most common patterns found in the liturgical and patristic texts. The Theotokos essentially "cancels out" Eve's transgression by giving birth to Christ. The first stanza of the Akathist to the Theotokos (sixth century) provides a typical example of this view: "Rejoice, thou through whom the curse shall be blotted out. Rejoice, thou the restoration of fallen Adam. Rejoice, thou the redemption of the tears of Eve."[44] Patristic writers commonly contrasted Eve's disobedience of God's command with Mary's obedience to the words of the Archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation (a theme that appears in the Latin tradition as well). The Eastern Fathers frequently represented Eve's transgression as one of ambition, i.e., she sought to become god-like without proper preparation.[45] By contrast, the Theotokos demonstrates humility in her reply to Gabriel: "Behold the handmaiden of the Lord; may it be to me according to thy word" (Lk 1:38). Irenaeus emphasized the contrast between Eve's unbelief and Mary's faith.[46] The parallels drawn by Byzantine and patristic

[43] Basil the Great, *The Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 1.8, 4.24; John Cassian, *Institutes* 12.4, *Conferences* 1.8.9; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 9.15; Ephraim the Syrian, *Hymn* 1 *On the Nativity*; John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 2.11; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 124; Origen, *On First Principles*, 2.1. Technically, Origen was not considered a father of the Church, but he was influential nonetheless. One might object that John Chrysostom was an exception to this trend, but for rhetorical purposes he attributed a greater degree of blame to Eve in *Homily* 31 *on Romans* 16:5, and *Homilies Addressed to the People of Antioch Regarding the Statues*, 7.7.

[44] Romanos the Melodist, "Akathist to the Mother of God," in *A Prayer Book for Orthodox Christians* (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1995), 216.

[45] John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 2.11. See also Gregory the Wonderworker, *Homily* 2; Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, 3.22.4, 4.preface.4; John Chrysostom, *Homily 3: On the Power of Demons*, 3-4.

[46] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, 3.22.4.

sources continue: both women were virgins, reminding a society that held monasticism in high esteem that virginity itself is no guarantee of sanctity.[47]

Perhaps the most significant key to how this contrast operates in Kassia's thought is found in the particular verbs used in the exchange between her and Theophilos. Eve's transgression, as the "wellspring" of death, is contrasted with the Virgin Mary's birthgiving, which is a "fountain" of life. The dialogue suggests this imagery through Theophilos's use of the verb ῥέω (to flow; to trickle) versus Kassia's use of πηγάζω (to gush from a spring). The juxtaposition of the two verbs allows Kassia to express the superiority of the Mother of God, in keeping with Byzantine theological tradition, in terms of sheer power (trickling versus gushing) and an ongoing action (Theophilos uses a past tense form, while Kassia employs a present form).[48]

In the subtext of the exchange, Kassia also defends women in general. The Greek wording is ambiguous (intentionally so, in my opinion) as to whether the speakers are commenting on woman as an ideological construct, or on the theological interpretation of the two specific figures of Eve and Mary. With no preceding article, διὰ γυναικὸς can mean "through woman" just as easily as "through a woman." Although the distinction is subtle, the application of this dialogue to a broader conception of womankind is very consistent with Kassia's other philosophical expressions.

In her writings, Kassia often counters Greek paradigms of women's weakness. She presents a Christian history full of independent and courageous women. For example, her hymn in honor of the Great Martyr Christina praises the saint for "throwing off the weakness of nature" in contending for the faith.[49] She describes

[47] John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4.24; Irenaeus of Lyons, ibid.; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 12.15; Ephraim the Syrian, *Hymn* 12 *On the Nativity*; Gregory the Wonderworker, *Hom.* 1; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 100; Basil the Great, *The Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4.24.

[48] See chapter one for the significance of the grammatical element known as aspect for this exchange.

[49] Tripolitis, 59.

the Martyr Natalia as "playing the man" (ἠνδρίσατο) when she urges her husband to accept martyrdom:

> How the woman played the man
> Against the bitter tyrant,
> And encouraged her husband
> Not to yield to the tortures
> But to choose to die for the faith rather than to live.[50]

Such vocabulary is fairly typical of the rhetoric found in Byzantine hymnography and hagiography. Judith Herrin asserts that the Church Fathers considered "the very idea of a holy woman . . . a contradiction in terms, which women could only get round by pretending to be men. Yet the existence of female martyrs gave women a model to follow."[51] However, she may be overstating the case that a woman had to effectively become a man in order to attain sanctity in Byzantine eyes.[52] Kassia's use of phrases such as "playing the man" reflects a standard literary device used to emphasize that women can possess the quality of "manly" courage; it does not necessarily negate the gender of these female saints.[53] Furthermore, men were also expected to emulate the lives of female saints, and men as well as women were the intended audience for those saints' festal hymns.

Kassia's gnomic poems, even more than her hymns, highlight the outlines of her feminist philosophy. In these verses, Kassia reflects upon socially defined gender roles and feminine virtues. As with her theological musings, Kassia remains quite traditional in her views, but there can be no question of her belief in the strength and power of women. In the poem "Woman," she praises female diligence while condemning indolence:

> A woman industrious and prudent, although in hard times,
> Definitely overcomes her misfortunes;

[50] Tripolitis, 71.

[51] Judith Herrin, "In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach," in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 179.

[52] Tripolitis, 71.

[53] Rapp, 323-4.

> But a woman lazy, idle, and mean,
> Actually causes misfortune.[54]

Here, Kassia underscores that fact that women played an integral part in the economic and social fabric of Byzantine society. Byzantine women frequently made legal and economic decisions, even becoming landholders and employers, according to tax records studied by Leonora Neville.[55] Even among aristocrats, women bore primary responsibilities for household management, including the spinning and weaving of cloth. "Hard times" for a Byzantine woman might include being widowed, losing her children, divorce, or even famine. A "bad" woman created difficulty for her family and neighbors; a "lazy" and "idle" woman failed to contribute to the family's economic assets and would be unable to support herself and her children in the event of her husband's death. Likewise, a "mean" woman might undermine the stability and spiritual health of her family and alienate the neighbors upon whom she would necessarily depend during difficult times.

Kassia recognizes the importance of family life in her hymns. Byzantine women's primary sphere of influence was domestic, and issues of family and children appear to have been preeminent.[56] Kassia likens the family to the Promised Land: "The company of family is like milk and honey."[57] She praises parenthood in her hymn for St. Euthemios the Great: "Be of good cheer, said the angel of the Lord to the parents, / Because a child will be born to you from your loins, bearing the name of cheerfulness."[58]

[54] Tripolitis, 121.

[55] Leonora Neville, "Taxing Sophronia's Son-in-Law: Representations of Women in Provincial Documents," in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience, 800-1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (London: Ashgate, 2006), 78, 81-3. On the economic and legal experience of Byzantine women, see Herrin, "In Search," and Angeliki Laiou, "The Church, Economic Thought and Economic Practice" in *The Christian East: Its Institutions and Its Thought, A Critical Reflection*, ed. Robert F. Taft, OCA 251 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1996), 435-64.

[56] Connor, 263.

[57] Tripolitis, 129.

[58] Ibid., 37. It is worth noting that Kassia's hymn for Saints Natalia and Adrian celebrate a married couple.

Within the basic social unit of the family, female gender roles often were defined according to the expectations of motherhood, and mothers were greatly extolled in Byzantine literature.[59] Mothers bore primary responsibility for childcare, which often included the education of their children.[60] Much of the education of the young revolved around teaching children psalms and prayers, indicating the importance of reading and the probable availability of prayer and psalter books, even among families of modest means.[61] Theoktiste, the mother of Theodore the Studite, was deprived of a normal education by the premature deaths of her parents. The literacy of her own children was of such importance to her that, once married, she studied at night after she had completed her household chores.[62] This example illustrates the importance placed on female literacy as a function of motherhood.

A mother's role as caretaker of the family extended beyond the merely physical and intellectual and encompassed the family's spiritual welfare as well. Although the clergy was exclusively male,[63] women were heavily involved in, if not primarily responsible for, private religious activity in the home. Kassia emphasizes the crucial

[59] Talbot, "Women," 118.

[60] Judith Herrin, "Public and Private Forms of Religious Commitment Among Byzantine Women" in *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion of the Night*, ed. Léonie J. Archer, Susan Fischler and Maria Wyke (New York: Routledge, 1994), 187; id., "Search," 171-2; Talbot, "Women," 118, 126, 130; Jill Dubisch, "Greek Women: Sacred or Profane," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 1, no. 1, 185-202.

[61] Given the relatively high literacy rate in Byzantium, the common people of the empire probably had less difficulty understanding liturgical Greek than scholars sometimes assume.

[62] George L. Huxley, "Women in Byzantine Iconoclasm," in *Women and Byzantine Monasticism*, ed. Jacques Y. Perreault (Athens: Canadian Archaeological Institute, 1991), 16.

[63] The exclusion of women from the clergy is a much-discussed matter that falls outside the scope of the present work. The office of deaconess was certainly still in use in the ninth century and was held by certain abbesses such as Irene Chrysovalantou, who preached to crowds of both men and women, but the other liturgical functions of deaconesses are obscure.

role of the mother in the spiritual development of children in this hymn honoring the Holy Maccabees:

> For these strong-spirited beings, descendants of Abraham
> Imitated the faith of their forefather Abraham,
> And struggled until death for religious devotion;
> For they were reared devoutly,
> And lawfully struggled together;
> They refuted the impiety of the accursed Antiochus;
> . . . . . .
> They devoted everything to God,
> Soul, bravery, feeling, tender body
> And the benefit of having been raised with a strict observance of religious duties.
> O pious root!
> From which you were born, Maccabees.
> O holy mother!
> Who brought forth children equal in number to the days of the week.[64]

This hymn underscores the significance of women's role in the moral education of children in Byzantine society. Much as the United States fostered the notion of republican motherhood, in which women were to inculcate liberal values in their children, so the Byzantines saw it as a mother's duty to instill Christian values.

Even after death, women retained responsibility for the spiritual welfare of family members. The making and offering of *kollyva*, a mixture of boiled wheat berries and fruit that is featured in the Church's memorial rite for the departed, was an essentially (though not exclusively) female cult practice in Byzantium. Kassia's centering of her hymn for Theodore the Soldier on *kollyva* is likely an indirect reference to women's ritual functions in the Church.[65]

The preeminent virtue ascribed to Byzantine women was modesty—an emphasis perhaps intended, in part, to counteract male reactions to female beauty, particularly of the "wanton" variety. Byzantine standards of speech and dress consistently reflected

[64] Tripolitis, 63, 65.

[65] Ibid., 74, 75.

this ideal.[66] For example, in Byzantine novels one encounters frequent references to women's "silence."[67] The ideal of gender segregation also served the purpose of enforcing standards of modesty, though actual Byzantine practices seem to have been quite inconsistent.[68] Leo VI's concern for the modesty of female speech ostensibly guided his edict in the *Ecloga*, which barred women from functioning as witnesses.[69] In reporting the bride-show, Byzantine chroniclers emphasize that Kassia's quick-witted retort was delivered "with modesty" (μετ' αἰδοῦς). She is even described as "blushing" (ἐρυθήματος),[70] clearly a rhetorical device rather than an accurate assessment of Kassia's forthright personality.

The chroniclers also described Kassia as beautiful and noble. The fourteenth-century *Chronikon* of Ephraim the Monk describes her as possessing "extraordinary beauty" (κάλλους περιττοῦ) and Leo the Grammarian states that Theophilos was "smitten by her beauty" (ὑπεραγασθείς αὐτὴν τοῦ κάλλους). Although similar advice might be delivered to any aspiring monastic, one suspects

[66] For more on female modesty in dress, see Timothy Dawson, "Propriety, Practicality and Pleasure: The Parameters of Women's Dress, A.D. 1000-1200" in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience, 800-1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (London: Ashgate, 2006), 41-76, and also Alice-Mary Talbot, "Women," 127. Byzantine standards of modesty continue to influence expectations of dress (e.g., long sleeves) for churchgoers in Greece.

[67] Corinne Jouanno, "Women in Byzantine Novels of the Twelfth Century: An Interplay Between Norm and Fantasy" in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience, 800-1200* ed. Lynda Garland (London: Ashgate, 2006), 145.

[68] For more on this issue, see Talbot, "Women," 120-132; Judith Herrin, "In Search," 169-171; Deno John Geanakoplos, *Byzantium: Church, Society and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 303, 412; Angeliki Laiou, "The Role of Women in Byzantine Society," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantistik* 31 (1981), no. 1, 249; Susan Walker, "Women and Housing in Classical Greece: The Archaeological Evidence" in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 81-91; and Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience, 800-1200* (London: Ashgate, 2006), xiii.

[69] In reality, women did provide testimony, including expert medical testimony. They even filed lawsuits.

[70] Symeon the Logothete (PG 109:685, C), George the Monk (PG 110:1008B), Leo the Grammarian (PG 108:1046A-B), John Zonaras (Rochow, 7-8). See Appendix 2 for my translations

that it was precisely because of her beauty that Theodore the Studite admonishes Kassia to avoid the gaze of men.[71]

Kassia devoted considerable attention to the topic of female beauty. In her hymn for the Great Martyr Christina, Kassia writes:

> Christ, the King of Glory,
> Fascinated by your maidenly beauty,
> Joined you to him as an unblemished bride in a pure union.[72]

This passage, reminiscent of Kassia's own experience of attracting attention at a king's bride-show, is followed by verses that possibly contain other biographical allusions. Note that Kassia takes pains to ally, rather to oppose, beauty and inner strength:

> [H]e provided strength along with your beauty,
> That proved unconquerable against both enemies and passions.
> It remained firm under bitter assaults and the most savage tortures.

We are reminded here not only of Kassia's suffering at the hands of the Iconoclasts, but also of Theodore the Studite's comment to her in *Letter* 142: "Since [Christ's] beauty has flashed into your heart, you will have it in you to extinguish any fleeting and perishable longings."[73]

Kassia further develops the spiritual implications of beauty in her poem "Woman":

> It is not good for a woman to be beautiful;
> for beauty is distracting;
> but if she is ugly and ill-mannered,
> without distraction it is twice as bad.
> It is moderately bad for a woman to have a radiant countenance,
> yet beauty has its consolation;

[71] Ephraim the Monk, *Chronikon*, quoted in Greek Rochow, 8-9. Leo the Grammarian, *Chronographia* (PG 108:1046A-B) and translated here in Appendix 2; Theodore the Studite, *Letter 142*, in Silvas, 34.

[72] Tripolitis, 61.

[73] Silvas, 34.

but if a woman is ugly,
what misfortune, what bad luck.[74]

Kassia's comments about ugliness are intriguing: she considers beauty to be of little account, but ugliness has no value whatsoever. Her linking of ugliness to ill manners may reflect the classical tendency to associate the good with the beautiful. Kassia may be intimating something deeper, however. The verses suggest that an unattractive woman in Byzantium might justifiably lament the consequences of her ugliness, such as the reduction of her potential value in marriage, subjection to verbal abuse, and so on. The fundamental problem with beauty in Kassia's thought, however, is that it is "distracting." These verses do not spell out whether female beauty is more distracting to men or to women, but the notion that women's beauty distracts men from the contemplation of God is commonly found in other Byzantine and patristic sources and provided one of the justifications for segregating men from women in church. When Theodore the Studite advises Kassia to "flee the gaze of males," he includes even "the gaze of those who are wise, in case you are smitten or yourself smite."[75]

Beauty could prove a distraction for Byzantine women as well as men. The effort an attractive woman spent on enhancing her looks could distract her from God, a concern expressed by John Chrysostom in particular. Similarly, a beautiful woman might well attract unwanted attentions from others that would certainly detract from her spiritual development. Kassia hints at this type of danger in her poem "Envy," preferring "to be envied at least for good deeds" and warning that "the affection of flatterers is like a painted suit of armor; for it commends you with deceptive delights."[76]

In "Beauty," Kassia argues strongly that spiritual blessings are of greater value than physical beauty:

One should prefer a drop of favor from God rather than great beauty.

[74] Tripolitis, 121.
[75] *Letter* 142, in Silvas 34-5.
[76] Tripolitis, 129, 123.

It is better to possess grace from the Lord,
Than beauty and wealth that does not gain grace.[77]

This position is consistent with the teachings Kassia received from her spiritual father, Theodore the Studite, who rhetorically inquired, "What is your beauty?" before stating, "Since [Christ's] beauty has flashed into your heart, you will have it in you to extinguish any fleeting and perishable longings."[78] Notably, Theodore contrasts two Greek words for beauty, ὡραιότερος (*oraioteros*) and κάλλος (*kallos*). He used the latter word earlier in the same letter to refer to the monastic life, implying a spiritual dimension, while the former term refers specifically to the beauty of youth. (Theodore strikes a similar tone regarding worldly beauty in his other two letters to Kassia.)

Throughout her own work, Kassia places greater value on spiritual matters than on worldly ones, a theme that will be further developed in the discussion of her writings on monasticism. Indeed, Kassia even hints that worldly blessings, including wealth and beauty (both of which she had in abundance, if we are to accept the testimony of the chronicles) actually impede spiritual growth, suggesting a nuanced reflection on her own life.

Although Byzantine ideals extolled feminine modesty, Kassia certainly did not advocate passivity in women. Her poem "I Hate" makes her attitude toward submissiveness abundantly clear:

I hate silence, when it is a time for speaking.
I hate the one who conforms to all ways.[79]

As a teenager, Kassia not only challenged the emperor verbally during the bride-show, but according to Theodore the Studite, she apparently defied imperial policy in order to support iconophile monks, suffering corporal punishment as a result. There is reason to suspect that Kassia identified closely with the defiant boldness shown by the women martyrs in challenging the Roman authorities.

[77] Tripolitis, 121. I have changed Tripolitis's phrase "drop of luck" (first line) to "drop of favor from God" because such a rendering Christianizes the composition in a way more consistent with the second line.
[78] *Letter* 142, in Silvas, 34-5.
[79] Tripolitis, 111

In yet another hymn to a female martyr, Kassia praises Agathe's agency and labels her as an "equal to Moses."[80]

In her poem "Woman," Kassia goes so far as to assert a type of female superiority:

> Esdras is witness that women
> Together with truth prevail over all.[81]

This obscure reference to 1 Esdras 3:10-12 and 4:13-47 demonstrates the depth of Kassia's religious education, as well as her views about the position of women. According to 1 Esdras, three bodyguards serving the Persian Emperor Darius staged a competition to determine which one could write the wisest sentence regarding strength. The first wrote, "Wine is the strongest," while the second asserted: "The king is the strongest." Zorobabel, the third bodyguard, wrote: "Women are the strongest; but above all things Truth beareth away the victory." Zorobabel implied that women rule over both wine and kings, and his winning answer secured the funds and imperial support for the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

While the original text of 1 Esdras does not portray the rule of women in a particularly positive light, Kassia composes her gnomic text to emphasize that women prevail when they act *together with* truth. She takes up a similar theme in her hymn honoring the Great Martyr Barbara:

> The evil one has been dishonored,
> Defeated by a woman,
> Because he held the First-Mother as an instrument of sin.

Kassia goes on to explain that by "throwing off the weakness of her nature . . . / [Barbara] bravely withstood the oppressors."[82] According to Eastern hermeneutical tradition, Satan sowed the seeds of death and corruption using Eve's weakness as a tool. Kassia's hymnography suggests that, by embracing Truth (Christ) a woman gains the strength required to overthrow the power of Satan.

[80] Tripolitis, 43.
[81] Ibid., 121.
[82] Ibid., 13; cf. Kassia's praise of Christina in Tripolitis, 57, 59.

Kassia's treatment of Eve reflects the typology of the Eastern Church Fathers, discussed in the previous chapter. Eve was the victim of a deception with cosmic implications. An obscure hymn of Kassia's, associated with the feast of Theophany, has Christ indirectly recalling this fateful deception on the occasion of his baptism in the Jordan:

> Wash me with these waters; with them
> I shall regenerate
> The whole of mankind
> That is ensconced in corruption
> And impiously enslaved by the serpent's
> Cunning.[83]

Kassia refers more directly to Eve's shame in her most famous hymn, "Lord, the woman in many sins," which is still sung by the Eastern Orthodox Church every year during Holy Week. The reference to "those feet at whose sound Eve hid herself for fear when she heard Thee walking in Paradise" implies that Eve's sin was forgiven when the sinful woman embraced Christ's feet (Luke 18).[84] In this hymn, Kassia expresses a pathos intended to resound in any hearer. Consider the "sinful woman's" cry:

> Woe is me . . . for night surrounds me, dark and moonless, and stings my lustful passion with the love of sin. Accept the fountain of my tears. . . . Incline to the groaning of my heart. . . . I shall kiss Thy most pure feet and wipe them with the hairs of my head . . . Despise me not. . . .[85]

Through the anonymity of the sinful woman, Kassia poetically indicates the universal consequences of the Fall.

As noted above, the Eastern Fathers typically interpret Genesis 3 with an emphasis on cosmic consequences of Eve's actions—death and corruption—rather than on Eve's individual guilt. In her writings, Kassia indicates that the Incarnation (and Resurrection) of

[83] Tripolitis, 33.
[84] Mary and Ware, *Lenten Triodion*, 541. There is a legend that Theophilos composed this particular line, but scholars largely reject the attribution as a product of romantic legend.
[85] Ibid.

Christ dealt specifically with these issues. Kassia associates Christ's compassion with his perception of His creation's bondage to death:

> Meanwhile your creation suffered the intrigue
> in Eden, Savior,
> and heard that having come
> from earth
> it will again return to earth;
> but not being able to endure
> its being held by death,
> You came, O my Savior, and saved it.[86]

Thus Kassia clearly identifies mortality as the cause of the Incarnation, consistent with the thought of Athanasius the Great.[87] She continues this theme in her hymn for the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, describing Christ as the one "who purifies the whole corrupt nature."[88]

Aside from Eve, most scholars exploring the ecclesiastical treatment of female figures focus on the Virgin Mary as an idealized model for feminine virtue. Such an interpretation of Mary as an object of exclusively feminine veneration is highly suspect. Virtually all of Kassia's verses referring to the Virgin Mary concern the Incarnation (see Chapter 3 for further discussion). However, the Theotokos does function in one of Kassia's poems as a type for Christians, albeit in a less-than-obvious manner. In "What is a Monastic?" Kassia writes: "A monk is an abode of God, a royal throne, palace of the Holy Trinity."[89] Her allegorical description of the monastic state borrows the familiar liturgical titles of the Theotokos. In other words, Kassia asserts that the true monastic (although *monachos* is masculine, she uses the term generically) is a *theotokos* in that he or she brings forth God in his or her own soul. Moreover, Kassia followed her spiritual father Theodore the

[86] Canon for the Dead, Ode 1, in Tripolitis, 89; cp. Tetraodion Canon for Holy Saturday, Odes 1 and 3, in Tripolitis, 80-83.

[87] Athanasius the Great, *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminar Press, 1996), 29-37.

[88] Tripolitis, 41.

[89] See Appendix 1.

Studite in claiming that monastics should be models for all Christians.[90]

We can conclude that Kassia utilized traditional Byzantine values and rhetoric in emphasizing female experiences and virtues such as family life, household management, motherhood, and modesty. Her feminist philosophy, while employing traditional Byzantine ideals of femininity, left no room for passivity or submissiveness, however. In her own life experience, as well as in her compositions, Kassia exemplified the power, strength, and action of women.

[90] See "On Monastics" in Appendix 1; see also Schmemann, 212-3.

3 KASSIA THE ICONOPHILE

The Son of God,

Who received flesh from a woman

whose countenance we honor in icons.

Ode Five of Kassia's Canon for the Dead

The Iconoclast controversy marked a watershed in the history of Byzantium. The issue polarized Byzantine society, driving citizens into two camps: Iconoclasts, who opposed the use of icons in religious devotions, and Iconophiles, who upheld the long-standing practice. Ultimately, both sides saw themselves as combating idolatry.[91] The controversy began with the iconoclastic proclamation of Leo III the Isaurian in 726 and raged until 843, when the empress Theodora finally restored "orthodoxy." The issue highlighted and exacerbated tensions between monastics and hierarchs, emperors and Church leaders, and men and women.[92] When the dust finally settled in mid-ninth century, the emperor held much less sway over the Church, while the influence of monastics had greatly increased. They would effectively dominate ecclesiastical policy and shape the theological and liturgical trajectory of the Eastern Orthodox Church for the next eleven centuries.

[91] Kenneth Parry, *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries*, ed. Michael Whitby et al (Leiden, New York and Köln: E.J. Brill, 1996), 25.

[92] These demographic elements were not uniformly divided, but there were trends towards certain populations generally choosing one side—e.g., the military tended to support Iconoclasm. For a fuller discussion, see Hélène Ahrweiler, "The Geography of the Iconoclast World" in *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975*, ed. Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (Birmingham: Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1977), 21-27.

Iconoclasm was the crucible in which Kassia's personality and philosophy were formed. She was an ardent Iconophile partisan from her youth. First as a laywoman and later as a nun, she intimately tied herself to the Studite monastic network, which headed the resistance to imperial Iconoclasm. Theodore the Studite's letters testify to her support of the imprisoned monk Dorotheos, and of Theodore himself while he was in exile. In *Letter* 270, he notes her willingness to suffer for the Iconophile cause:

> If indeed you have already chosen to suffer for Christ in this present persecution—as though it were not enough that you were beaten in the past—and again, you chafe because you are unable to endure your burning longing for the good confession, well then, may you be kept fervent in such dispositions![93]

Theodore's use of the terms "persecution" and "good confession" implies that Kassia was beaten, i.e., flogged, as a part of an imperial sentence imposed for pro-Iconophile activities.[94] Such zealous devotion to the Iconophile faction is naturally reflected in her writing, especially her hymnography. These elements will be examined in greater detail later in this chapter.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE ICONOCLAST DEBATE

In the eighth century, Byzantium suffered natural disasters and significant losses of territory to the Arabs and the Slavs. These misfortunes weighed heavily on the Iconoclast emperors, who concluded that the Byzantine state had somehow incurred divine judgment. Such was the explicit concern voiced by Leo V when he reinstated Iconoclasm in 815: "Why are the Christians suffering defeat at the hands of the pagans? It seems to me it is because the icons are worshiped and nothing else. And (for this reason) I intend to destroy them."[95] Taken as a whole, the sources suggest that the impetus behind imperial Iconoclasm was concern for the welfare of the state: it was an attempt to eradicate a practice that had caused God to withhold His blessings.[96]

[93] Theodore the Studite, *Letter* 270, in Silvas, 35.

[94] Another possibility, since the military tended to support Iconoclasm, is that the beating Kassia received may have been a matter of family discipline rather than a corporal sentence. This speculation is supported by Theodore's expressed hope that Kassia's father, "the ever-memorable general," would find his way to the "orthodox communion" (of, presumably, the Iconophiles).

The Iconoclasts' principal argument derived from the Second Commandment prohibition against the creation and worship of idols (Ex 20:4-5). In addition to Old Testament texts, the Iconoclasts supported their position by appealing to early Christian opposition to the veneration of imperial images.[97] John of Damascus defined the Iconophile response in the eighth century by introducing two elements of vital importance into the debate: a distinction between the "veneration" (*proskynesis*) and "worship" (*latreia*) of icons, and a defense based on Christology that would strongly influence Kassia's hymnography a century later. John attacked the Iconoclast interpretation of the Old Testament commandment regarding idolatry on the grounds that the Incarnation of Christ had changed the very nature of worship. He argued that when God took on flesh, he became visible and therefore subject to depiction.[98] Additionally, John attached soteriological significance to the veneration of icons: the Incarnation enabled the icon, although it was a material object, to serve as a vehicle of grace for believers, united those things that seemed to be in opposition.[99] By opposing the veneration of icons, the Iconoclasts, in John's view, were not

[95] Geanakoplos, 157.

[96] Even pre-Christian Roman emperors considered religion a matter of state and the sixth-century law code of Justinian enshrined concern over Christian dogma as an imperial concern. See Justinian, *Novella VI*, in Geanakoplos, 136; also Cyril Mango, "Historical Introduction," in *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975*, ed. Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (Birmingham: Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1977), esp. 2-3. Herrin notes the correlation between political instability and the rise of strong military Iconoclast emperors in "The Context of Iconoclast Reform" in Bryer and Herrin, 15-20.

[97] Parry, 1-5.

[98] John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans. Andrew Louth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 4, 6.

[99] Parry, 24-5, 27.

only interfering with an established practice, but threatening the very salvation of Christians deprived of this grace.[100]

Art historian Liz James argues that, as far as the Iconophiles were concerned, an iconographer was not "creating" a graven image, but simply "executing" a truthful representation based upon a heavenly prototype.[101] The image itself was considered true, not in the sense of historical, scientific, or anatomical accuracy, but because it reflected the theological truth of its prototype.[102] The Iconophiles thus drew a distinction between an icon and an idol: the idol has no actual prototype, while the icon depicts Christ, the saints, and biblical events, and the iconographer creates his or her representation based on those prototypes.[103] In this light, the Iconophiles considered iconographers as craftspeople more than artists, since the latter relied more on the employment of the imagination.

In the middle of the eighth century, Constantine V Copronymos convened the Council of Hiereia, which accused the Iconophiles of violating the tenets of Chalcedon and condemned John of Damascus and Germanos I, Patriarch of Constantinople.[104] Constantine V also persecuted monastics beginning around 760. (His brutality toward monastics may explain the preservation of his

[100] Barber notes that the use of images dated to the 630s at the latest. Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 9.

[101] Liz James, "Art and Lies: Text, Image and Imagination in the Medieval World" in *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Liz James (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 59-71, and "...and the Word was with God ... What Makes Art Orthodox?" in *Byzantine Orthodoxies: Papers from the Thirty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Durham,* 23-25 March 2002, ed. Andrew Louth and Augustine Casiday (Hants, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 103-110.

[102] Leslie Brubaker, "In the Beginning was the Word: Art and Orthodoxy at the Councils of Trullo (692) and Nicea II (787)" in *Byzantine Orthodoxies: Papers from the Thirty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Durham,* 23-25 March 2002, ed. Andrew Louth and Augustine Casiday (Hants, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 95-101. John Elsner, "Image and Iconoclasm in Byzantium," *Art History* 11 (1988), 471-91. Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 44, 46, 70, 107-23.

[103] Parry, 28, 44-5, 49-51.

[104] Geanakoplos,155.

unflattering epithet in the ecclesiastical records, which were maintained by monks.) Most scholars have linked this persecution to Constantine's Iconoclast policies, since monasteries were the leading producers of icons. Iconoclasm, in turn, threatened the monks' economic interests and may have driven them to become leaders of the Iconophile movement. Stephen Gero, however, argues that ninth-century hagiographers may have conflated the two policies, particularly understandable when we realize that Studite monks led the Iconophile resistance of the ninth century. One unintended consequence of Constantine's persecution of the monastics might easily have been the further polarization of Byzantine society, effectively pushing the monastics into an increasingly zealous and organized Iconophile faction.[105]

The Empress Irene, Constantine V's daughter-in-law, restored the icons in 787 at the Second Council of Nicaea, ending the first phase of Iconoclasm.[106] Irene had supposedly kept and venerated icons in secret, a practice commonly attributed to Byzantine women during Iconoclasm. Some Iconophiles were dissatisfied with the Nicaea council because of its very moderate condemnation of the Iconoclasts.[107] Since many in the military were still loyal to the late Constantine V, Irene may have wanted to limit the scope of condemnation in order to stave off a military coup. She further demanded that the council refrain from condemning her late husband, Leo IV, who had ended his father's monastic persecutions and struck a considerably more moderate Iconoclast position.[108]

[105] It would be an overstatement to assume that Byzantine monastics formed a unified Iconophile front. In the sources, one finds that Iconoclasts and Iconophiles came from all social strata.

[106] Irene actually used the masculine title "Emperor" (*basileus*) when she signed the imperial endorsement of the Council of Nicaea of 787, perhaps because the idea of a woman reigning was foreign at this point in Byzantine history. See Eva Catafogiotu Topping, *Saints and Sisterhood: The Lives of Forty-eight Holy Women* (Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing, 1990), 277.

[107] Theodor Damian, *Theological and Spiritual Dimensions of Icons According to St. Theodore of Studion* (Lewiston, NY and Queenston, ON: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 75.

[108] Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm During the Reign of Constantine V, with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources*, Corpus Scriptorum Chris-

Actual progress toward restoring the icons in the late eighth century seems to have been minimal, and many of the larger churches remained unadorned.

Emperor Leo V initiated the second wave of Iconoclasm in 815 in response to further political and military instability. Theodore the Studite directly challenged Leo's imperial order by leading a Palm Sunday procession with icons. He became the de facto leader of the Iconophile movement, which included monastics and large numbers of women, including Kassia. Leo V's successor was a moderate: he released Iconophiles from prison but refused to restore the icons.[109] One of his letters indicates that he was not opposed to icons per se, only to their excessive veneration.

By 833, "[a] widespread persecution, obviously carefully orchestrated" [110] began under Emperor Theophilos, with whom Kassia had once sparred in the famous bride-show exchange. Iconophiles were exiled, imprisoned, tortured, and killed. Monks and nuns continued to form the base of Iconophile resistance, perhaps because the Studites had come to dominate the monastic culture of Byzantium.[111] One of the more infamous atrocities of Theophilos' Iconoclastic campaign was the branding of the Graptoi brothers, Theodore and Theophanes (later the famed chronicler known as Theophanes the Confessor).

Despite Theophilos' fervor for the Iconoclast cause, his wife and mother-in-law remained unyielding Iconophiles. Although Theodora never defied the emperor in public, rumor held that she kept icons in her private apartments. (One of Kassia's lines, "I hate silence, when it is a time for speaking" may well reflect Iconophile scorn for Theodora, who refused to denounce her husband's

tianorum Orientalum, vol. 384 (Louvain: Universitatis Catholicae Lovaniensis 1977), 140.

[109] Dmitry Afinogenov, "The Conspiracy of Michael Traulos and the Assassination of Leo V: History and Fiction," DOP 55 (2001), 330-41. John H. Rosser, "Theophilus 'the Unlucky' (829 to 842): A Study of the Tragic and Brilliant Reign of Byzantium's Last Iconoclastic Emperor" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1972), 43-45, 64.

[110] Rosser, 77.

[111] Ibid., 81.

iconoclasm publicly.[112]) After Theophilos died in 842, Theodora took the throne and expelled the synod of the Iconoclast patriarch, John, who had resigned. The Iconophiles found themselves split between two factions, the moderates and the Studite zealots.[113] The historical record certainly paints a much uglier picture of the restoration of the icons than does the famous icon commemorating the event, in which Theodora and John's moderate successor, Patriarch Methodios, appear in a unified procession with Studite saints and ninth-century confessors.[114] Regardless of the political wrangling involved, Byzantine Iconoclasm was officially over in 843.

The Iconophile victory had a ripple effect on the Byzantine world and, coincidentally, on Kassia's legacy within the Eastern Orthodox Church. The monastic "coup" that was effectively accomplished in 843 meant that monastics played a major role in the Church, with the Studites dominating the trajectory of liturgical and dogmatic consolidation until the sack of Constantinople in 1204. The Studites established and consolidated the liturgical *typikon*, fixed the festal cycles, and compiled the great liturgical books: the

[112] Kassia, "I Hate," in Tripolitis, 113. Kassia's spiritual father, Theodore the Studite, famously asserted, "The Commandment of the Lord is not to remain silent in times when the faith is in danger."

[113] Patricia Karlin-Hayter, "Methodios and His Synod," in *Byzantine Orthodoxies: Papers from the Thirty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Durham, 23-25 March 2002*, ed. Andrew Louth and Augustine Casiday (Hants, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 61-2. See also Karlin-Hayter, "Gregory of Syracuse, Ignatios and Photios" in *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975*, ed. Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (Birmingham: Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1977), 141-45.

[114] Dimitra Kotoula, "The British Museum Triumph of Orthodoxy Icon" in *Byzantine Orthodoxies: Papers from the Thirty-Sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Durham, 23-25 March 2002* (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 121-8. Kotoula identifies a nun in the icon as Theodosia, the eighth-century martyr. The compilers of *The Spiritual Mothers* assert that iconographic tradition dictates that this figure is Kassia, who was a ninth-century Iconophile connected to the Studite network. Given the ninth-century time period of the icon, it seems more likely to be Kassia than Theodosia.

Menaion, *Pentekostarion*, and *Triodion*.[115] In large part, Kassia's hymns and liturgical writings were preserved as an indirect result of these larger, enduring Studite accomplishments.

WOMEN AS ICONOPHILES

A striking aspect of the Iconoclast controversy was the division of proponents and opponents along gender lines. As noted in the previous chapter, Byzantium was a patriarchal society that restricted the activities of women. The period of Iconoclasm, however, produced a striking number of female saints who were all Iconophiles, including the empresses Irene and Theodora, the nuns Theodosia and Anthousa, and Kassia herself. According to legend, the nun Theodosia suffered martyrdom when she led a mob of women against the soldiers charged by Leo III with the removal of the icon of Christ from Constantinople's Chalke Gate. It is striking that it was female rulers who overturned Iconoclasm: first Irene, in 787, and finally Theodora, in 843.

It is impossible to fully answer the question of why women, in particular, were drawn to support the Iconophile cause. The source material is simply too sparse to provide a coherent picture of the matter; undoubtedly, some women held Iconoclast views, but their legacy was not preserved. Nonetheless, we can speculate that since women's movements and activities in the public sphere were severely limited, the Church may have offered one of the few venues where women could be participate in the public sphere. As a result, ecclesiastical matters would have natural appeal for Byzantine women seeking outlets beyond the confines of their homes.

[115] Elsner, 482-5. James, "Art and Lies ...," 63, and "... and the Word...," 109. Robin Cormack, "Painting After Iconoclasm" in *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975* ed. Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (Birmingham: Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1977), 153. Mary and Ware, *Lenten Triodion*, 41-2. Robert Taft, "The Liturgy of the Great Church: An Initial Synthesis and Interpretation on the Eve of Iconoclasm," DOP 34-5 (1980-1), 45-75, and his *The Byzantine Rite: A Short History* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 58, 60.

The dynamics of gender segregation in Byzantine society may have played an even more consequential role. There was an obvious delineation of gender roles, with men involved in commerce, government, and the military, while women had nearly complete dominion over domestic matters. The Byzantines considered icons to be domestic assets: Byzantine dowry agreements, for example, often list icons in the first position.[116] Since they appear first on the list of assets, icons must have had notable monetary value, a notion supported by Byzantine tax assessments. Furthermore, since all dowry property belonged to the woman, icons were female property. Thus, a ban on icons would directly threaten women's economic negotiating power in marriage.

Icons also appear to have held prominent roles in women's extra-ecclesial ritual activities as well. Textual evidence attests that women played roles in lay religious brotherhoods, some of which were devoted to particular icons.[117] Byzantine homes had special areas devoted to the family's collection of icons, which were sometimes kept on permanent display.[118] Both John of Damascus and Kassia use the term *pinax* (literally, plank), which indicates that portable panel-icons, of the type appropriate for familial use, were already known by the Iconoclastic period.[119] These facts together suggest that icons played a significant role in private familial devotions, for which women were likely responsible.

Byzantine ecclesiastical sources demonstrate the significant role women played in religious education and as models of piety for their children. Both Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, for example, credited their mother, Emilia, and sister Macrina with decisively shaping the trajectory of their spiritual lives. According to his recorded *Life*, Theodore the Studite's mother, Theoktiste, was similarly responsible for his education and piety. In other

[116] Nicolas Oikonomides, "The Holy Icon as an Asset," DOP 45 (1991), 38.

[117] Judith Herrin, "Public and Private Forms of Religious Commitment," 197-9.

[118] Marcus Rautman, *Daily Life in the Byzantine Empire* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 132. Modern Orthodox homes often feature such an "icon corner" for family prayers.

[119] Tripolitis, 96.

words, according to Byzantine gender paradigms, a woman was responsible for the family's spiritual welfare as well as for the physical health of its members.[120] The banning of icons therefore posed an immediate threat to that welfare, both economic and spiritual. Paradoxically, women's support for the icons was rooted in a line of thought very similar to that of the emperors who opposed icons: both considered the veneration of icons an issue central to the welfare of the constituents in their respective spheres of influence.

ICONOPHILE THEMES IN KASSIA'S WORKS

With this historical context in mind, we can identify some of the more prominent Iconophile elements in Kassia's compositions. Major themes include her response to Iconoclast charges of idolatry, which were often leveled during the persecution of Iconophiles, and her distinctively Incarnational theology. Although her writings rely on traditional Byzantine rhetoric and terminology, there is ample reason to believe that even her strictly religious compositions contain loaded meanings that would have been recognized by her contemporaries.

The principal charge against the Iconophiles was idolatry. Kassia addresses this charge in two hymns. In the Orthros hymn for the Great Martyr Christina, Kassia writes:

> We praise your great mercy, O Christ,
> And your goodness to us,
> Because even women have abandoned the error of idol-mania
> By the power of your Cross, friend of mankind;
> They were not frightened by the oppressor, but trampled the deceiver,
> They were strong to follow behind you
> And they quickly moved to the scent of your myrrh
> Interceding on behalf of our souls.[121]

[120] Cultural anthropologist Jill Dubisch has identified similar patterns in Greek village life. See, for example, her "Men's Time and Women's Time: History, Myth, and Ritual at a Modern Greek Shrine," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 5, no. 1 (1991), 1-26, and "Greek Women," 185-202.

[121] Tripolitis, 57, 59.

She includes a number of references especially meaningful to an audience reeling under Iconoclast persecutions. First of all, the hymn refers not so much to Christina as an individual saint, but to women collectively (who were known, of course, for holding Iconophile views). Since Byzantine authors generally disapproved of women's participation in public affairs, we can imagine that the Iconoclasts surely criticized the prominent role of women in the Iconophile movement. The line "even women have abandoned the error of idol-mania" hints at Kassia's response to such a charge. Careful speculation allows us to reconstruct the Iconoclast polemic: women, being weaker and simpler than men, were more likely to mistake the created for the Creator and thus to commit idolatry. Kassia counters with the example of St. Christina, who inspired even "mere" pagan women to "abandon the error of idol-mania" and place their faith in the Cross—which, of course, was the one visual image considered acceptable by the Iconoclasts.

Secondly, the reference to these women's "fearlessness" before "the oppressor" could refer to those who suffered for the Iconophile cause, including Kassia herself. She sounds a similar note in her hymn for the martyrs Adrian and Natalia, praising the wife for resisting the "bitter tyrant."[122] The "tyrant" could easily be a veiled reference to Theophilos. While the extolling of martyrs' courage in the face of torture is a standard motif in Byzantine hymnography, its use here is consistent not only with the general context of the Iconoclast controversy, but also with Kassia's feisty and loyal personality. Her gnomic poem "Friendship" may refer indirectly to the suffering she herself endured for supporting the monk Dorotheos and Theodore the Studite: "A crisis will reveal a true friend; for he will not desert the one who is his friend."[123]

Persecuted for their "orthodox" view of icons, the Iconophiles naturally identified with saints of the past who stood up against heresy. In her hymn in honor of the fourth-century bishop Gregory of Nyssa, Kassia writes:

[122] Tripolitis, 71.

[123] Ibid., 109.

Along with the orthodox tenets
You defeated the foreign heresies,
And established the authority of Faith.[124]

Kassia's celebration of Gregory's defense of orthodoxy certainly would have had a ring of vindication during and immediately after the Iconoclast persecutions under Theophilos. She further invokes the intercessions of the Apostles Peter and Paul to oppose the enemies of the "true" faith represented by the Iconophile cause:

Cast down those who are against us
and strengthen the true faith."[125]

Kassia waxes political again in one of her most famous hymns, "When Augustus reigned upon the earth." This Christmas *doxastikon* contrasts the universal power of the great Roman emperor with the unifying advent of Christ:

When Augustus reigned alone upon earth, the many kingdoms of men came to an end: And when Thou wast made man of the pure Virgin, the many gods of idolatry were destroyed. The cities of the world passed under one single rule; and the nations came to believe in one sovereign Godhead. The peoples were enrolled by the decree of Caesar; and we, the faithful, were enrolled in the name of the Godhead, when Thou, our God, wast made man. Great is Thy mercy: Glory to Thee.[126]

By describing the emperor's influence as less universal than that of Christ, she may also have been issuing a warning that, no matter how powerful the imperial throne, God was greater. Alternatively, if the hymn was composed after 843, Kassia may be sounding a triumphal note, celebrating victory over powerful figures that had falsely charged the Iconophile faction with idolatry.

"When Augustus reigned" also allows Kassia to introduce her interpretation of the single most important theological point of the Iconoclast debate in the Iconophile view: the Incarnation. The first

[124] Ibid., 35.
[125] Ibid., 53.
[126] Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware, trans., *The Festal Menaion*, vol. 12, December (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 254.

line establishes a causal link between the Incarnation and the end of pagan "idolatry." She thus reinforces the Iconophile argument that, by assuming a human form, God became visible and could thus be depicted in the human form of Jesus Christ *without* violating the commandment against idolatry. Furthermore, her attention to subject of the Incarnation in itself marks her as an Iconophile theologian—not because she had something new to say on the subject, but because the Incarnation (particularly the discussion of Christ's materiality) acquired a much more prominent emphasis in Byzantine theology and hymnody during the Iconoclast period as compared to earlier centuries.

In *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius the Great indicates that the purpose of the Incarnation was to restore the image of God in humanity.[127] Kassia clearly refers to this idea in the first ode of her Canon for the Dead:

The one dwelling on high came to earth
taking a mortal body,
so that, Lord of immortality,
you could give life
to all mortals and
return them to the former sinless state.[128]

Kassia's works frequently emphasize the body of Christ. For example, she praises Christ for "accepting a human body" in her hymn for Theophany.[129] Her known hymns employ a form or derivation of the word ἡ σάρξ (*sarx*, flesh) in connection with the Incarnation no less than ten times.

In assuming a human nature, Christ "wiped clean the sins of the mortals" and, in Kassia's view, "regenerate[d] the whole of mankind that is ensconced in corruption."[130] In one of her Christmas hymns, she indicates that Christ unites "life with immortality."[131] Gregory the Theologian expressed the concept thus: "For

[127] Athanasius the Great, *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminar Press, 1996), 29-37.
[128] Tripolitis, 89.
[129] Ibid., 31.
[130] Forefeast of the Theophany, in Tripolitis, 31, 33.
[131] Tripolitis, 25.

that which He has not assumed, He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved."[132] In Kassia's words, Christ "put on a body /and deified the mortal body."[133]

Deification (*theosis*) is the centerpiece of Eastern Christian soteriology and mysticism. Kassia expresses the consequences of Christ's deification of the body in her hymn for the Dormition (August 15), the principal feast of the Theotokos in the Byzantine Church:

> And with songs of praise let us glorify
> her revered and holy body (σῶμα),
> the dwelling-place of the Lord
> Who is not to be seen by us [the angels].[134]

In Byzantine thought, the Theotokos was deified, enjoying the "first-fruits" of salvation because through her Christ was "made human" (ἐνανθρωπήσαντος).[135] Significantly, in Kassia's theology, because the Word of God assumed flesh from the Virgin Mary, the angels glorified her body. In other words, by assuming human flesh Christ redeemed the human body, transfiguring not only His own but also the bodies of the saints. In keeping with Iconophile tradition, Kassia may be suggesting in her hymns that by extension Christ redeemed all matter, including that used to make icons.

To paint the Iconophiles as heretics, Constantine V notoriously accused them of being either Nestorians (dividing the person of Christ) or Monophysites (denying Christ's human nature). In her treatment of the Incarnation, Kassia counters these charges by carefully navigating the Christological straits established by the ecumenical councils. At the Council of Ephesus in 431, the Church officially adopted the title of Theotokos (Birth-giver of God) for the Virgin Mary, rejecting the Nestorians' proposed Anthropotokos (Birth-giver of Man) or Christotokos (Birth-giver of Christ). Throughout her hymnography, Kassia praises the Virgin Mary for providing mortal flesh to the uncircumscribable God and not

[132] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Ep. 101*.
[133] Tripolitis, 20-23.
[134] Ibid., 68.
[135] "When Augustus reigned," in Tripolitis, 18.

merely a human being. In her Canon for the Dead, for example, Kassia addressed her thus:

> Mother of God [*Theotokos*];
> for you alone received
> the infinite God
> containing him in your womb.[136]

The paradox of the infinite God contained in the Virgin's womb is a common motif in Byzantine hymnography, and Kassia's works are replete with affirmations of Christ's deity in relation to the Theotokos. Her hymn for the Dormition, for example, identifies the Theotokos as "she who bore the Creator of heaven and earth."[137]

In Kassia's thought, the Theotokos is inseparable from the Incarnation of God Himself. For the Feast of the Annunciation, she writes: "For in you has come to dwell bodily (σωματικῶς) the fullness of the Godhead (πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος)."[138] With this hymnographic allusion to Col 2:9 ("For in Him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily"), Kassia further illustrates the biblical soundness of Iconophile theology. Additionally, by referring to the New Testament, Kassia in effect invokes a higher authority than the Iconoclasts with their dependence on Exodus.

In her hymn for the Great Martyr Barbara, she even uses the term *Logos*, which was often invoked by theologians in the Christological debates, to affirm Christ's divinity in the Incarnation:

> The evil one has been dishonored,
> defeated by a woman,
> because he held the First-Mother as an instrument of sin;
> for the *Logos* of the Father,
> simple and immutable,
> as only He is known,
> was made flesh of a Virgin
> and removed the curse of Eve and Adam,
> Christ deservedly crowned Barbara the Martyr,

[136] Theotokion, Ode 3, in Tripolitis, 92.
[137] Tripolitis, 68.
[138] Ibid., 47.

and through her gives to the world a means of atonement and
great mercy.[139]

The parallels between Barbara and Eve as females is an obvious rhetorical point, but Kassia also takes advantage of the proximity of Barbara's feast day (December 4) to Christmas to talk about the Incarnation. Her *sticheron* emphasizes not only Christ's becoming flesh of the Virgin, but also His being the "Word of the Father, simple and immutable" (employing the neoplatonic phraseology adopted by Christian theologians in the fourth century). She thus expresses the Iconophile devotion to Christ's making known, i.e., visible and circumscribable, the fullness of Deity.

While emphasizing the deity of Christ in the Incarnation, Kassia carefully avoids the pitfalls of Monophysite theology. For example, in her Christmas hymn "When Augustus reigned," she emphasized Christ's full humanity with the term ἐνανθρωπήσαντος ("became human").[140] In two other hymns, Kassia uses the phrase, "born from the Virgin as a human being" (τεχθέντα ἐκ Παρθένου ὡς ἄνθρωπον).[141] Kassia prefers the verb τίκτω (*tiktô*) for describing the action of the Virgin's childbearing. It clearly refers to parturition, and contains the root of second part of the compound of the Virgin Mary's title, Theotokos. In one hymn, she calls the Virgin "God-generator" (θεογεννήτρια, *theogennêtria*); the second half of this compound noun clearly implies not only the process of giving birth, but also what in a modern context might be called "genetic origin." A controversial Monophysite argument was that Christ's divine nature could not have suffered death. Kassia affirms the orthodox position thus: "As God . . . by Your death [You] granted to the faithful peace and life and exultation."[142]

[139] Ibid., 13. Kassia refers to Christ as the Divine Word (τὸν θεὸν λόγον) in the Theotokion for Ode 1 of her Canon for the Dead (Tripolitis, 90).

[140] Ibid., 18.

[141] For the Feast of the Nativity (Tripolitis, 22) and the Forefeast of Theophany (Tripolitis, 30). The English rendering is mine; though it lacks poetic value, it accurately reflects both the language and Byzantine Christology.

[142] Canon for Holy Saturday, Ode Five, in Tripolitis, 87.

Kassia stresses Christ's humanity with her use of the words *anthrôpos* (human), *tiktô* (give birth), and *gennêtria* (generator). At the same time, she emphasizes the divinity of Christ, even at the moment of His Incarnation, by describing Him as *Logos* and *Theos*, indicative of His infinity and immortality. Not only does Kassia avoid both Nestorianism and Monophysitism, but she further counters the heresies of the Monotheletes and Monoenergists. These latter groups sought a compromise between the Monophysites and the Chalcedonians, i.e., the Orthodox, by arguing that Christ had two natures (*physeis*) but only one will (*thelêma*) and one energy (*energeia*), respectively. The Chalcedonian party responded that these positions effectively deprived Christ of the fullness of human nature, which consists not only of a human body but also of a human soul with free will and independent capacity for action. Kassia fully expressed orthodox Byzantine Christology in the Theotokion for Ode 5 of her Canon for the Dead:

We acknowledge you one Lord
in two complete natures,
both in will (θελήσεσιν) and activity (ἐνεργείαις)
the Son of God,
Who received flesh from a woman
whose countenance we honor in icons.[143]

By proclaiming one Lord, she denies Nestorianism. By proclaiming Christ's two natures, both in will and activity, she likewise denies Monophysitism and its offspring. In the final line, she attacks Iconoclasm directly by affirming both the Incarnation and its relationship to the veneration of icons. In fact, she carefully chooses her words to make her Iconophile point: since the Son of God received flesh (*sarx*), Christians honor (the verb is *timeô*, which is distinct from "worship") the wooden boards (*pinax*) upon which His mother, the Theotokos, is painted. In other words, Kassia holds that Christ, by assuming human, material nature from His Mother, blessed Christians to venerate material images of Himself and the saints.

[143] Tripolitis, 97.

The quality of Kassia's theological erudition is evident in her refined use of the technical vocabulary of Incarnational theology. Another technical term associated with the Incarnation in Byzantine theology is *kenosis*. The term expresses the "self-emptying" of the Word of God, who willingly set aside His divine glory to assume the frailties of human nature and save the human race. Kassia uses this term in her most famous hymn, the *doxastikon* of the Orthros *aposticha* of Holy Wednesday, commonly called the "Hymn of Kassiani." She puts the following words into the mouth of the sinful woman from Lk 7:36-50: "Incline to the groanings of my heart, O Thou Who in Thine ineffable self-emptying hast bowed down the heavens."[144] On another occasion, Kassia uses the term *kenosis* to refer to Christ's death upon the Cross:

> Foreseeing Thy divine self-emptying [κένωσιν] upon the Cross, Habakkuk cried out marveling: 'Thou hast cut short the strength of the powerful, O gracious and almighty Lord, and preached to those in hell.[145]

Kassia frequently employs another term, condescension (συγκατάβασιν), to describe Christ's willingness to assume human flesh.[146] Similarly, she connects the Incarnation with the economy (οἰκονομία) of salvation.[147] Through these various verses, Kassia captures the Christology central to Iconophile thought.

Through her sophisticated compositions, Kassia upheld the Iconophile position and expressed Christological orthodoxy as the Byzantine Church defined it after 843. Thus, we can justly conclude that Kassia was not simply a "poet" but a true theologian, carefully and exquisitely expressing a sophisticated and subtle Christology. In fact, her theological expressions have the confirmation of ecclesiastical use. During her own time, her theological writings would have been more accessible to Byzantine society as a whole than the

[144] Mary and Ware, *Lenten Triodion*, 540-1; cf. Kassia's reference to Christ's *kenosis* in verses for the Meeting of the Lord, Tripolitis, 41.

[145] Eirmos of Ode 4 of the Canon for Great and Holy Saturday, Mary and Ware, *The Lenten Triodion*, 648.

[146] Hymns for the Nativity of Christ, Tripolitis, 20; the Presentation, 30; and the Annunciation, 46.

[147] Tripolitis, 20.

writings of John of Damascus or the other Church Fathers. Through her inclusion in the official liturgical books of the Eastern Orthodox Church, she continues to instruct the laity in Christian theology—including the proper role and veneration of icons—to the present day.

4 KASSIA THE MONASTIC

A monk is a spiritual stringed instrument, an organ
melodiously plucked.

Kassia, "On Monastics"

The Byzantine liturgical books generally attribute Kassia's hymns to "Kassia the Nun" (as opposed to "Kassiani the Hymnographer," her common appellation by the Eastern Orthodox Church). Sometime after the bride-show, Kassia founded a monastery for women located on Xerolophos, the seventh hill of Constantinople.[148] The original name of the monastery was not recorded, and the sequence of events leading to its founding is somewhat obscure. Chroniclers George the Monk and Leo the Grammarian imply that Kassia founded her monastery immediately following the bride-show, after "failing to attain the queenship" (τῆς βασιλείας ἀποτυχοῦσα). A number of scholars have accepted this reasoning at face value, which perhaps explains why Kassia is frequently characterized as "bitter."[149] A careful evaluation of sources beyond the tenth-century chronicles does not support the idea that Kassia became a nun out of disappointment, but yield a very different impression of her relationship to the monastic life. The *Great Synaxaristes*

148 Lives of the Spiritual Mothers, 373.

149 Annemarie Weyl Carr, "Women and Monasticism in Byzantium: Introduction from an Art Historian," BF 9 (1985): 10; Diane Touliatos, "Kassia," in *Women Composers: Music Through the Ages, Vol.* 1*: Composers Born Before 1599*, ed. Martha Furman Schleifer and Sylvia Glickman (New York: G.K. Hall & Co, 1996), 2.

describes her as "relieved and excited about her future prospects,"[150] since Theophilos's rejection freed her to pursue her desire to become a bride of "an omnipotent Bridegroom" and to receive "noetic riches" and "an allotment from the King of the Heavens."[151]

The three letters that Theodore the Studite addressed to Kassia imply that she had cherished a desire for the monastic life from her youth. Kassia's letters *to* Theodore have not survived, however, and no one has been able to date his correspondence with any certainty. Silvas proposes that all three of his letters are from the 820s.[152] Rochow suggests that *Letters* 140 and 270 date to 816 or 17, and places *Letter II* 205 at around 825. She further demonstrates effectively that all three letters are addressed to the same person, and that *Letter* 270 is almost certainly to Kassia the poet.[153]

Theodore's use of the term *korê*—as in "maiden of Christ" (κόρη Χριστοῦ) in *Letter* 142 and "maiden lately sprung" (κόρη ἀρτιφυεῖ) in *Letter* 270—suggests that he wrote to a young, unmarried woman, since *korê* would be inappropriate for a married woman. In *Letter II* 205, Theodore also refers to "the lady our sister" and to the "ever-memorable general" and "his spouse," although the "general" (presumably her father, the *Kandidatos* from whom Kassia received the title *Kandidatissa*) seems to have died by the time of the letter's composition, to judge by the phrasing.[154] These references suggest that Kassia was still young enough at the time to be living with her mother or a female guardian. Theodore also sends greetings "to her who brought you forth into the light through the fashioning of the true light, like the mother of the day."[155] One could interpret such phrasing as a reference to a spiritual mother, perhaps indicating that Kassia had professed her

[150] Lives of the Spiritual Mothers, 373.

[151] Ibid.; Silvas, 22. Ephraim the Monk *Chronikon*, in Rochow, pp. 8-9 (see Appendix 2 for the full text). See also John Zonaras, *Chronikon*, in Rochow, pp. 7-8 (also in Appendix 2).

[152] Silvas, 33.

[153] Rochow, 23-6. Alice Gardner, in *Theodore of Studium: His Life and Times* (London: Edward Arnold, 1905), 228-9, proposes that Theodore actually addresses two different women named Kassia.

[154] *Letter II* 205, in Silvas, 37.

[155] *Letter* 270, in Silvas, 36.

monastic vows. However, the balance of internal evidence from the three letters indicates that Kassia had not yet entered the monastery.

The content of *Letters* 142 and 270 point to Kassia's yearning for the monastic life. In *Letter* 142, Theodore offers this advice almost as a sort of pre-training for monasticism:

> You have preferred the noble life according to God, you tell me, from childhood. You have become the bride of Christ: neither seek nor love another. . . . Since [Christ's] beauty has flashed into your heart, you will have it in you to extinguish any fleeting and perishable longings. Flee, then, flee the gaze of males—even, if proper, the gaze of those who are wise, in case you are smitten or yourself smite. You are accepted by the Bridegroom who is in heaven. It is there you will see Him to whom you belong, with Whom you shall receive an everlasting dowry.[156]

Theodore's language is veiled; while it appears that the addressee is a young woman living "in the world," several rhetorical elements appear to point to the monastic life, e.g., "bride of Christ" and the exhortation to "flee the gaze of men." Theodore appears to bless Kassia to pursue either the monastic or the married life, although he prefers the former:

> Since there is already a confession of Christ, it is clear that the life of monastic perfection should blaze forth. Blessed are you either way. Only, do not expect the laying on of my hand, since I am a sinner, but by that hand, by whose sacred administering you will be hallowed.[157]

His support for either lifestyle, may indicate his sensitivity to Kassia's youth, and a reluctance to see her commit herself to monasticism before she is mature enough to handle its rigors. It could also represent Theodore's respect for the desires of her family to see her married (perhaps, depending on the timing, even to the emperor himself).

[156] *Letter* 142, in Silvas, 34-5.

[157] *Letter* 270, in Silvas, 35-6.

Kassia appeared to possess willfulness, independence, and access to wealth. As a young girl, she was already contributing some sort of monetary support to Theodore, and later she had the necessary capital to build her own monastery. The combination of these factors may indicate that she was an only child, which, in turn, would surely have heightened her family's concern for her marriageability. All in all, Theodore's letters support the claim that Kassia had genuine aspirations from childhood for becoming a monastic, none of them contingent on Theophilos's rejection.

One finds echoes of Kassia's devotion to monasticism in her own writings, along with hints as to the sorts of social pressures she likely experienced. Kassia seems to have identified with the Great Martyr Thekla in terms of familial pressure to marry. In her hymn honoring the first-century martyr Thekla, who spurned marriage in dramatic fashion, she includes these lines:

> You rejected the earthly suitor and bride-chamber
>
> . . . . . .
>
> You were not persuaded by a mother's coaxing.[158]

Theodore's *Letter* 270 hints that Kassia was also torn between her love of monasticism and the wealth available to her in the world, for he refers to "gold and silver, fame and a pleasant life, and all that it seems good to have among earthly things."[159] According to Ephraim the Monk, Kassia did, in fact, reject these things as Theodore advised, preferring to be "rich noetically [with] an omnipotent Bridegroom and the allotment of a heavenly kingdom" rather than marry the emperor.[160] In another hymn, Kassia writes sympathetically of the Martyr Eudokia's sacrifice of worldly pleasures:

> The pious and martyred one
> Left behind the pleasures and complexities of life,
> And lifting the cross on her shoulders,
> Came to be wed to You, O Christ. . . .[161]

[158] Tripolitis, 5.
[159] Silvas, 35.
[160] Ephraim the Monk, *Chronikon.*
[161] Tripolitis, 45.

Stunningly beautiful (if the literary sources are to be believed), wealthy, noble, and ostensibly a contender to be empress, Kassia must have been highly marriageable. Her choice to enter into the monastic life surely involved real sacrifice for her and her family, especially if she never wed—and there is no evidence to suggest that she did.

The date at which Kassia established her monastery is unclear. The Byzantine chronicles merely suggest that she entered the monastery immediately following the bride-show. Recent scholars date the founding of Kassia's monastery to 843, after the end of Iconoclast persecution.[162] This conclusion appears to be based on Theodore the Studite's use of the prepositional phrase μετὰ τὴν παῦλαν τοῦ διωγμοῦ in *Letter* 270. Anna Silvas translates the sentence in which this phrase appears as "Your choice of life as a lover of monastic life—after, as you say, the persecution ceases."[163] Alice Gardner renders the same statement as, "Your choice of the monastic life comes, you say, from the persecution."[164] Both scholars, however, comment on the difficulty of interpreting Theodore's Greek; according to Silvas, "alternative understandings of the context and punctuations of the text might yield different nuances of translation at several points."[165]

However, just because Theodore indicates that Kassia's intention to become a monastic was somehow linked to the persecutions under Iconoclasm does not mean that she actually delayed her profession until those persecutions were over (some eighteen years after the estimated date of the letter's composition). Indeed, it hardly seems consonant with Kassia's personality to delay entering into the monastic life out of fear of persecution. I would even suggest that another possible translation of Theodore's phrase might be "in quest of a cessation of the persecution." This interpretation suggests that Kassia's embrace of monasticism reflected the belligerent, partisan mood of the Iconoclast era, as well as her personal desires.

[162] Tripolitis, xiv; Silvas, 21-2.
[163] Silvas, 35.
[164] Gardner, 227.
[165] Silvas, 34.

Regardless of exactly when Kassia became a monastic, all three of Theodore's letters consistently depict a woman who desired the monastic life from a very young age (she is called not only a "maiden," but one "lately sprung"), who actively supported the Studite Iconophile resistance by making gifts to Theodore in his exile, and who even endured corporal punishment for the Iconophile cause. Simply put, Kassia does not come across as the sort of person who would be frightened away from becoming a nun. The image of Kassia one derives from the sources is of a woman of powerful partisan views whose personality (discussed in more detail in the next chapter) can best be described as "feisty."

MALE AND FEMALE MONASTICISM IN BYZANTIUM

For strong, independent Byzantine women like Kassia, monastic life provided unique advantages and opportunities. Although the Byzantine Church was hierarchical and patriarchal in structure, ecclesiastical life offered far more room for female independence than did Byzantine secular society as a whole. The monastic tradition, in particular, was surprisingly egalitarian. The life of nuns in the early monastic era (ca. 350-600) was virtually identical to that of monks, and it was widely accepted that a woman advanced in that life could even offer spiritual guidance to men, a trend that continued in the Byzantine period. Various saints' *Lives* reveal that Byzantine women monastics served as "spiritual fathers" for men and women alike. Anthousa of Chios, for example, was the abbess of a double monastery in the eighth century, leading a community of men as well as one of women.[166]

Within Byzantine monasticism, women were essentially equals to men. The term "nun" does not exist in Greek: μοναχή (*monachê*) is simply the feminine form of μοναχός (*monachos*), and Kassia uses the latter term generically in two poems (see Appendix 1). Likewise, there is no term applied specifically to a female community, such as "convent"; the same Greek word, μονή (*monê*), applies to a

[166] Double monasteries in which a single abbot or abbess rules over adjoining men's and women's communities do appear occasionally in monastic history, but they were always viewed as "abnormal." Thus, they were rare and seldom survived the death of their founders.

monastery for either gender. Each monastery was independent and formulated its own rule, called a *typikon*, which regulated all aspects of its residents' lives. The various *typika* that have survived from both men's and women's monasteries are fundamentally identical. Even the monastic habits of men and women were essentially the same: both sexes wore black robes and belts and head-coverings.[167]

Normally, however, a number of functions in women's monasteries were reserved for men. Since only men could be priests, women's monasteries depended on external clergy to meet their sacramental needs. Male doctors usually provided the medical care for women's monasteries, although women physicians were not unknown in Byzantium. Monasteries also needed an *ephoros*, a lay trustee who oversaw external affairs such as legal property transfers. The *ephoros* was usually a man, and Theodora Palaiologina employed traditional rhetoric when she reasoned that "women of a gentle and weak nature . . . need strong protection, inasmuch as they are accustomed to staying at home and the silence which is most appropriate for women."[168] Although Byzantine women could and did exercise legal rights, evidence suggests that the legal system itself was biased in favor of men, so the preference for a male *ephoros* was no doubt mainly practical. A layman would be able to press the interests of a monastery more effectively in male-dominated courts than a woman, or even a male monastic who had dedicated his life to prayer rather than to administrative and legal matters. However, there were exceptions to the rule: the empress Eirene-Eudokia, wife of Alexios I Komnenos, stipulated in her *typikon* for the monastery she founded that the *ephoreia* was to remain in the hands of women from her family.[169]

[167] Agnes Basilikopoulou, "Monachism: L'Égalité Totale des Sexes," in *Women and Byzantine Monasticism* ed. Jacques Y. Perreault (Athens: Canadian Archaeological Institute, 1991), 102-3; Khalifa Abubakr Bennasser, *Gender and Sanctity in Early Byzantine Monasticism: A Study of the Phenomenon of Female Ascetics in Male Monastic Habit with a Translation of the Life of St. Matrona* (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1984), 75.

[168] Talbot, "A Comparison of the Monastic Experience of Byzantine Men and Women," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30 (1985), 11.

[169] Elizabeth C. Koubena, "A Survey of Aristocratic Women Founders of Monasteries in Constantinople between the Eleventh and the Fif-

The fact remains that women held all of the important offices *within* a women's monastery.[170] That nuns would hold those positions analogous to household management—the *kellaritissa* (cellarer), *trapezaria* (overseer of food preparation and the *trapeza* or dining hall), the *oreiareia* (overseer of foodstuffs) and *oinokoa* (overseer of the wine cellars)—is not surprising, given the Byzantine division of gender roles. However, women also held offices pertaining to finances, such as the *docheiaria* (the monastery's treasurer and purchasing agent), *chartophylakissa* (archivist), and *oikonomos*, who oversaw the monastery's landholdings and the sale of agricultural produce. The *hegoumenê* (abbess) had complete spiritual and administrative authority. She gave spiritual counsel to her nuns (and to pilgrims, both male and female), carried a staff like her male counterparts, sat on a throne during the church services, and sometimes preached. In addition, nuns functioned as the acolytes. The *ecclesiarchissa* had charge over the monastery churches and liturgical life, and the *skeuphylakissa* functioned as sacristan for the altar ware and holy vessels. In short, a Byzantine women's monastery was a woman's world. Men, insofar as they were present at all, were outsiders; even the priest was clearly a servant, not director, of the institution.

There were, however, significant discrepancies in the numbers of men and women who entered the monastic ranks. Record keeping was problematic, of course, so reliable figures are difficult to ascertain and the situation may have fluctuated widely from century to century. In general, however, it appears that women made up a much smaller proportion of the Byzantine monastic population, and that men's monasteries greatly outnumbered women's. Some twenty-two percent of Byzantine monasteries appear to have been female with just over ten percent of the surviving *typika* from women's monasteries.[171] The ratio of female to male saints in the

teenth Centuries" in *Women and Byzantine Monasticism*, ed. Jacques Y. Perreault (Athens: Canadian Archaeological Institute, 1991), 27.

[170] While Connor, 272, claims that those offices "with most responsibility were held by men," she overlooks the monastic offices discussed here (and the fact that the male priest and *ephoros*, for example, were both external to the monastic community).

[171] Talbot, "A Comparison of the Monastic Experience," 1-2.

Byzantine period indicates a similar trend, i.e., women account for one-eighth of the saints from the Iconoclast period.[172]

There are several possible reasons for discrepancies in the numbers of male and female monastics. In the early monastic period, many women pursued the monastic life in private homes, a practice that continued into the Byzantine era, particularly in areas where there was no monastery for women nearby.[173] This phenomenon might also explain the relatively few recognized female saints, since saints generally came from the ranks of those whose lives and feats were sufficiently public to engender veneration.

Another obvious factor is life expectancy: Byzantine women lived thirty-five years, on average, compared to forty-two years for men, with many women dying in childbirth.[174] Although a few individuals, such as Kassia, did exhibit an inclination to the monastic life from childhood, the social pressures to marry and produce heirs were considerable, and one can imagine that many men and women who were inclined toward monasticism wed in order to satisfy familial expectations. For this reason, the majority of Byzantine monastics, both male and female, came from the ranks of the widowed—and since widowers, with their longer lifespan, outnumbered widows, that left a larger pool of male candidates for the monastic life. It was also not uncommon for married couples to separate later in life, by mutual consent, in order that each spouse might pursue the monastic life, as Theodore the Studite's parents did after their children were grown.[175] Whether this practice reflects the delayed fulfillment of prior desire, or simply the norms of Byzantine culture, which regarded monasticism as the "angelic life," is unclear.

Women's monasteries were usually located in the cities, with the vast majority (seventy-seven of ninety-three) in Constantinople

[172] Talbot provides statistics on women saints according to period in her introduction to *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996), x-xi.

[173] Herrin, "Religious Commitment," 190-1.

[174] Talbot, "Women," 121, 124; Connor, 264-5; Laiou, "Role of Women in Byzantine Society," 236.

[175] Talbot, "Late Byzantine Nuns," 107-9.

itself, including Kassia's.[176] Although the eremitic life remained the monastic ideal, it does not seem to have been an acceptable choice for Byzantine women.[177] Instead, they pursued the coenobitic life within urban monasteries. I posit three explanations for this phenomenon. First, women's monasteries depended on male clergy for their sacramental needs, so an urban setting would provide greater access to a pool of available priests. Secondly, the countryside was dangerous, particularly for women. Leo, Bishop of Argos voiced this concern in a memorandum from 1143, regarding a women's monastery at Areia:

> For throughout the year our coastal waters have been swarming with pirates, who plunder everything with total license, and commit any outrage they wish against anyone who falls into their hands. Thus a not ignoble fear has disturbed me, lest this convent, which is vulnerable to attack by pirates because of its proximity to the sea, be destroyed by them, and lest, in addition to the loss of monastic property, the nuns be the victims of rape, which is special delight for men who once and for all have cast aside their fear of God and embraced the life of a pirate.[178]

Leo subsequently removed the nuns to a new monastery at Bouze, further from the sea, and repopulated Areia with monks. Throughout the Byzantine era, cities offered better protection from pirates and marauding bands of Arabs and Turks (and, presumably, from licentious Byzantine brigands). Thirdly, aristocratic women like Kassia, who tended to reside in the capital, were often the founders of women's monasteries.

Monastic life attracted Byzantine men and women for a number of reasons. The primary motivation for monastics of both sexes was, simply put, the opportunity to work out one's salvation, especially near the end of life. Pious Byzantines regarded monasticism and its concomitant asceticism as the surest path to salvation

[176] Talbot, "A Comparison of the Monastic Experience," Table 1, 18.
[177] The opening line of Kassia's "On Monastics" expresses this ideal. See Appendix 1.
[178] Quoted in Talbot, "A Comparison," 4.

short of martyrdom. Indeed, the monastic life was considered a form of martyrdom (as was marriage, incidentally).[179] Monasteries were places of spiritual devotion, and monastics devoted their lives to both corporate prayer, such as the performance of the services of the Church's liturgical cycle, and to private prayer. The latter, often referred to as the individual's "cell rule," had developed by the fourteenth century into the hesychastic practice of repeatedly reciting the Jesus Prayer. Such an interior focus weighs heavily in Kassia's reflections on monasticism, as discussed below.

In contrast to the West, Byzantine monasteries were not primarily places of charity, medical care, or education, though they might support charitable institutions or hospitals, old-age homes or even, though rarely, schools.[180] They sometimes received orphans and children of impoverished families; however, this practice was discouraged and even forbidden in some *typika*.[181] Monasteries sometimes took in the mentally ill and handicapped as well. Political prisoners were frequently sent to monasteries (including members of imperial families on the losing end of a coup, who were often maimed by their enemies before being sent into seclusion) along with prostitutes and sorcerers, with the idea that the monastics would have a positive influence on the deviant's repentance.[182] The *Lives* of various saints indicate that women's monasteries in particular served as havens for victims of domestic abuse.[183]

Despite these multifaceted functions, most people entering Byzantine monasteries seem to have genuinely desired the monastic life. Although most monastics were widowed, as noted above, it seems unlikely that men and women considered the monastery simply a type of "old folks' home," particularly since such institutions already existed in Byzantium. Rather, it seems likely that they sought to finish out their lives in devotion to God in order to better prepare for death and judgment.

[179] Talbot, Holy Women of Byzantium, xiii.
[180] Charanis, 80-3.
[181] Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium*, 105; cf. countless counsels against accepting "beardless boys" into monasteries appear in Byzantine monastic literature.
[182] Talbot, "Late Byzantine Nuns," 111-2.
[183] Ibid., 109.

For women, as noted above, monasteries offered an officially sanctioned environment in which to practice female autonomy. Women's monasteries furnished the Byzantine Church with a counter-cultural voice that was able to challenge prevailing patriarchal practices and attitudes. Kassia's own voice is especially notable in this respect, with the Byzantine chroniclers unanimously describing her as a "hymnographer," a title primarily conferred on male writers. Leo specifies certain famous compositions including her "Lord, the woman in many sins" and her Tetraodion Canon for Holy Saturday, both of which are still in use in Eastern Orthodox liturgical practice.[184] Later writers such as John Zonaras, Ephraim the Monk, and the author of the *Patria of Constantinople* imply that Kassia produced most of her compositions for her monastery. Kassia's hymns hint at a sense of monastic equality, and many of her compositions indeed appear to have been written for specific use within her own monastery. Her *eirmos* from the Canon for Holy Saturday, for example, reads, "But as the maidens (αἱ νεάνιδες), let us sing unto the Lord, for He is greatly glorified," indicating that she was writing for a female choir.[185]

Kassia's hymns may have been intended for use in men's monasteries (e.g., Studion) as well as her own, however. Her use of the term "soul-mates" (σύμψυχοι) in her Canon for the Dead suggest that it was written for monastics of both genders who had died. The ninth ode mentions "fathers" as well as "brothers and sisters," but makes no mention of mothers. This omission suggests two likely possibilities: first, that Kassia uses the terms "fathers," "brothers," and "sisters" to describe monastic relationships, rather than family ties, and second, that Kassia herself was the "mother," i.e., founder and abbess, of the community for which she was writing, in which case no "mothers" would yet have reposed.

As abbess, Kassia had to formulate a monastic vision and implement it with her community. Her *typikon* has not survived, however, nor have any sermons, letters on administrative matters, or spiritual counsels. All that survives is her poetry (and, one must acknowledge, possibly an incomplete catalog at that). For these reasons, our knowledge of Kassia's philosophy of monasticism will always be imperfect. Nonetheless, she articulated a remarkably thorough monastic philosophy that can be ascertained through a careful reading of her poems.

[184] Regarding the Tetraodion Canon for Great and Holy Saturday, the picture is complicated. Only *part* of Kassia's canon is still in use: the *eirmoi*, or introductory verses, of the first five odes. See Tripolitis, xii, and Savas J. Savas, *The Treasury of Orthodox Hymnology: Triodion: An Historical and Hymnographic Examination* (Minneapolis: Light and Life, 1983), 54.

[185] Mary and Ware, *The Lenten Triodion*, 646; Savas, 54-5.

KASSIA'S PHILOSOPHY OF MONASTICISM

Kassia's understanding of monastic retreat did not consist of hiding from the world; indeed, such timidity seems incompatible with her character. Symeon the Logothete, Leo the Grammarian, and George the Monk all describe Kassia as pursuing asceticism and the "philosophic life" (φιλοσόφῳ βίῳ in Symeon; the participle "philosophizing," φιλοσοφοῦσα, appears in George and Leo). Byzantine writers from Basil the Great to Michael Psellos have termed monasticism "true philosophy," in contrast to mere sophism. Although they may be referring to the concept of monastic contemplation (*theoria*), a term like "philosophizing" could also refer to intellectual pursuits, since the learned classes in Byzantium studied the classical traditions.[186] Furthermore, the Byzantines did not make a hard and fast distinction between the life of prayer and the intellect.[187]

Much of Kassia's extant writing incorporates traditional Byzantine monastic themes. Her poems "On Monastics" and "What is a Monastic?" incorporate her reflections on the nature of monasticism itself.[188] Traditional monastic themes that appear here, as well as elsewhere in her corpus, include the remembrance of death, noetic purification, solitude, renunciation of the world, obedience, stillness (*hesychia*), discernment, chastity, and repentance. These themes are briefly discussed below and their treatment by Kassia

[186] Sénina, 339-40, includes Kassia among the "Hellenists."

[187] For a thorough study of the interchangeability of these concepts in patristic thought, see A.N. Williams, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[188] See Appendix 1 for my translation of the complete text of these two poems.

compared to that of other writers whose works were familiar to the Byzantine world, and especially to an educated woman of Kassia's rank.

The influence of John Climacus, a sixth-century author highly regarded within the Byzantine Church, is particularly apparent in Kassia's two monastic poems. The Byzantines considered Climacus's *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* to be the standard manual for the monastic life.[189] As we will see, Kassia quotes *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* almost verbatim in her "What is a Monastic?" and she repeats one of Climacus's constructions—"A monastic is" (Μοναχός ἐστί)—in both poems. However, her monastic thought displays no mere slavishness to this classic work. Her poetry often uses a very different thematic construction, one in keeping with much of her other writing. Although she frequently draws upon Climacus and other older texts, she reworks them to add an original twist to traditional themes.[190]

For Kassia, the impetus for monastic life begins with the stark reality of mortality. Her "What is a Monastic?" opens with the declaration:

> Today in the world
> and tomorrow in the grave—
> remember death, and make use of it unto life.

Although John Climacus does not introduce the virtue of the remembrance of death (μνήμη θανάτου) until chapter six of *The Ladder*, for Kassia it is the beginning. Nonetheless, Kassia does not depart from Climacus's essential ideas on the subject. He declares the remembrance of death to be "the most essential of all works" and defines the monk as a "pained soul" who is in constant remembrance of death whether awake or sleeping.[191]

[189] John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Lubheid and Norm Russell (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982). An abbot on Mount Sinai, John likely used his text for instructing his monastic community in the ascetic life. Eastern Orthodox monasteries still appoint the reading of *The Ladder* in its entirety during Lent.

[190] For example, Kassia's interpretation of 2 Esdras in "On Woman," or her interpretation of Plato, according to Sénina.

[191] John Climacus, 132, 74.

In the next two stanzas of "What is a Monastic?" the concept of purification follows immediately after remembrance of death:

> A monk is a hallowed *nous*
> and a cleansed mouth.
>
> A monk is one who has attained to the rank and status
> of the bodiless ones
> in a body material and foul.

Here, Kassia is clearly alluding to this line from *The Ladder*: "A monk is a hallowed body, a purified mouth, and an enlightened nous,"[192] demonstrating the close relationship between her thought and that of Climacus. While Climacus proceeds from the physical to the spiritual, Kassia inverts the order of Climacus's discussion and also "edits" the text.[193] This rearrangement makes it clear that, according to Kassia's philosophy, spiritual purification begins with noetic practice rather than bodily purification. This is not to suggest that asceticism has no role in Kassia's spirituality, only that her concept of purification derives mainly from an interior disposition.

In his first chapter or "step," John Climacus discusses the theme of withdrawal from the world (Ἀναχώρησις κόσμου). Indeed, the first three steps of his *Ladder*—renunciation, detachment, and exile—can be treated together as an existential break with the world. This break from worldly life is absolute in Kassia's philosophy of monasticism, and she describes it as a metaphorical death:

> A monk is a living corpse.
> To be a monk is a voluntary death to the world.[194]

[192] Translation mine; the Greek text reads Μοναχός ἐστίν, ἡγνισμένος σῶμα καὶ κεκαθαρμένον στομα καὶ πεφωτισμένος νοῦς. John of Sinai [John Climacus], *Κλῖμαξ* [*Klimax*, "Ladder"] (Attica: Monastery of the Paraklete, 2006).

[193] The stanza beginning "A monk is one who has attained ..." is a verbatim quotation from *The Ladder*, while the preceding stanza is Kassia's modification of the line that follows in Climacus's thought. See Appendix 1 for the Greek.

[194] "What is a Monastic?" See Appendix 1 for the full text. Cf. John of Sinai 4.3, where he describes obedience as "voluntary death."

Scholars have long correlated the rise of monasticism with the end of the Roman persecutions, so it is only natural that the theme of detachment from the world should also appear in Kassia's praise for the Maccabean Martyrs:

> They . . . never preferred the things of the present life
> over the eternal one;
> they devoted everything to God. . . .[195]

This explicit association between the monastic break with the world and a martyric death further explains why Kassia began her reflections in "What is a Monastic?" with the theme of death.

Kassia's gnomic poem "On Monastics" sets forth the break with the world at its outset, and seemingly depicts the monastic life as one of solitude:

> He is a monastic who has only himself.
> He is a monastic who has a single-thought life.
> The monastic having earthly cares
> has been called many things, but not monastic.

However, it should be noted that the radical withdrawal suggested by these verses was not Kassia's practical experience. As already noted in this chapter, Byzantine monasteries for women were coenobitic, although they preserved aspects of the eremitical ideal by housing the nuns in individual cells rather than common dormitories. In her Canon for the Dead, Kassia does situate monastic life in the context of a community. The ninth ode expresses her intimacy with those around her:

> In everlasting remembrance fathers and brothers,
> both kinsmen and also friends and soul-friends,
> who have already taken the fearsome road,
> instead of a contribution, receive
> the gift of this hymn by me.[196]

[195] Tripolitis, 63, 65.

[196] Translation mine from the Greek in Tripolitis, 104. The Greek plurals encompass both genders (e.g., *adelphoi* can mean "brothers and sisters" as well as "brothers).

The first person pronoun indicates the very personal nature of this composition, which, as noted earlier, was likely written for Kassia's own monastery. The term "soul-friends" (σύμψυχοί, *sympsychoi)* not only suggests monastic ties, but also indicates intense spiritual intimacy, far beyond simple emotional attachment or common interests.[197]

Kassia's poem "Friendship" may offer some hints as to the nature of this "soul-friendship." The poem begins by asserting: "For two [not] holding dear the friendship in Christ, concord is not possible, but rather exceeding strife."[198] Such an interpretation is strengthened by the fact that Paul uses the term *sympsychoi* in Philippians 2:2: "Complete my joy by being of the same mind, of the same love, united in heart (*sympsychoi*), thinking one thing." When Kassia extols "a friend sharing his sufferings with his dearest friends," she may be referring to the spiritual intimacy of this soul-friend relationship. That such a relationship forms the basis for Kassia's idea of friendship in this poem is further evident in her line: "The friend who is exalted will raise up his friends with himself."[199] The ode further indicates that Kassia composed this poem in honor of dear spiritual companions in her own monastery and men in monasteries in the same network, as there is no evidence that Kassia's was a double monastery.

Kassia expresses the ultimate meaning of the monastic life, whether in a community or in a hermitage, by calling it the "single-thought life." The Greek term μονολόγιστος (*monologistos*) reflects the tradition in Eastern Christian monasticism of guarding the thoughts (*logismoi*) in order to focus solely on God. This tradition found its ultimate formal expression in the monastic hesychasm of the fourteenth century. In contrast to John Climacus, who presents

[197] I have borrowed from Irish monastic tradition the term "soul-friend" (*anamchara*) because it seems to adequately convey the sense of a spiritual camaraderie and accountability implied by the Greek.

[198] Translation mine from the text in Tripolitis, 106. Tripolitis points out in a footnote on 107 that the line makes sense only if one supplies the word μὴ.

[199] Tripolitis, 107. The second line is my own translation from Tripolitis, 108.

hesychia or stillness as his twenty-seventh step, Kassia places "single-minded" devotion at the beginning of her monastic scheme.

Kassia stresses that a monastic who has not renounced all earthly concerns is not a true monastic. Two aspects of life in the world that must be renounced by monastics appear frequently in her writings: wealth and marriage. In her hymn for the Great Martyr Christina, Kassia connects this renunciation of possessions and family with the "single-thought" life: "Leaving the wealth of her family, and longing sincerely for Christ, the martyr found heavenly glory and riches."[200] Similarly, Kassia describes Martyr Eudokia of the Samarians as "forsaking the pleasant and changeable things of life," [201] which echoes Theodore the Studite's words to Kassia: "For gold and silver, fame and a pleasant life, and all that it seems good to have among earthly things, are in no way among the beautiful, even if so called, since such things are ephemeral and perishing, dreamlike and shadowy."[202]

According to Theodore's letter, Kassia's rejection of such "ephemeral" things provided the very impetus that led her to monasticism. Indeed, given Kassia's wealth and aristocratic background, such pious rhetoric surely had a deeper personal resonance. She refers to renunciation of marriage once again in praising the Great Martyr Thekla:

> You rejected the earthly suitor and bride-chamber,
> First among martyrs, Thekla,
> And took a heavenly bridegroom, Christ our God.[203]

In Kassia's thought, however, a monastic renounced more than a life of leisure and family. Disdain for worldly education and the classical literary heritage was a common motif among Byzantine monastic writers, and Kassia was no exception. She praises the Martyr Eustratios and his compānions for their astute choice in this regard:

[200] Tripolitis, 59.

[201] The hymn for Eudokia is my own translation, based on the text in Tripolitis, 44, which reads: Καταλιποῦσα τὰ τερπν ὰ ποικίλα τοῦ βίου.

[202] Silvas, 35.

[203] Tripolitis, 5.

> Above the teachings of the Greeks
> The holy martyrs preferred the wisdom of the apostles,
> Abandoning the books of the orators
> And excelling in those of the fishermen.[204]

Such scorn for "Greek" wisdom may seem markedly hypocritical, given that Kassia, along with most of the Church Fathers, enjoyed the fruits of an excellent classical education. Furthermore, Kassia was a numbered among a circle of "Hellenists" who surrounded Leo the Mathematician.[205] Theodore the Studite himself compares her writing with that of the ancients in *Letter* 270. Sénina indicates that Kassia drew on Plato (and other writers such as Sirach or John of Damascus), citing a line and then adding a twist of her own.[206] Kassia appears to have used this very technique in the final stanza of "On Monastics," which draws ultimately on Demosthenes although she seems to have received the classical text indirectly.[207]

From her starting point of renunciation and self-imposed exile, Kassia in "On Monastics" next considers the stable yet free nature of monastic life. She avers that:

> A monastic's life is without curiosity.
> A monastic's life is altogether peaceful.

Climacus associates these same qualities with obedience (step four) in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*: "Obedience is . . . a simple life, danger faced without worry."[208] The Greek word translated here as "simple" (ἀπερίεργος) is essentially synonymous with Kassia's "without curiosity" (περιεργίας ἄνευ). In speaking of obedience, Climacus further warns against trusting one's own judgment, another

[204] Tripolitis, 17.

[205] Sénina, 339-40. Peter Karavites, 97-8, notes Gregory of Nazianzus's influence on Kassia. The influence of Athanasius the Great on Kassia's thought is noted in Chapter 3, "Kassia the Iconophile." Kassia wrote hymns for Basil the Great and his brother Gregory of Nyssa that demonstrate her familiarity with their writings.

[206] Sénina, esp. 337-8.

[207] See Appendix 1, n. 1. Sénina notes pre-Christian sources for Kassia's works including Aesop, Menander, and Euripides, 333-4.

[208] John Climacus, 91.

common theme in the monastic tradition.[209] One of Kassia's epigrams echoes this emphasis on receiving instruction: "The sagacity of children is the discourses of their elders."[210]

The Ladder further describes obedience as "death freely accepted." Climacus embellishes on this theme: "The blessed living corpse grows sick at heart when he finds himself acting on his own behalf, and he is frightened by the burden of using his own judgment."[211] Kassia defines the monastic in much the same terms when she writes, "A monk is a living corpse . . . a voluntary death to the world."[212] (This sentiment is also expressed by John Cassian, Kassia's namesake, who explains that a monk declined an inheritance by saying: "I died to the world before he did."[213])

Generally, however, discussions of obedience in monastic sources emphasize the benefits of patient endurance of discomfort, even abuse. Another easily overlooked but important theme is that obedience sets a limit on self-destructive zeal. The *Gerontikon* (fifth-sixth century) includes a humorous anecdote about John the Dwarf, a paragon of obedience who is nevertheless required to seek forgiveness from his "elder brother," who mocks him because John has been following his own will in his quest to become like an angel.[214] Kassia's "What is a Monastic?" comments on this danger as well:

> Be mindful of the word
> and do not go beyond for this also
> is in much need of attention.[215]

[209] John Climacus, 92, 259. See also Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 36, for an example from the Desert Fathers.

[210] The Greek reads: Σύνεσις παίδων γερόντων ὁμιλίαι. The translation given here reflects Kassia's monastic context.

[211] John Climacus, 91, 92.

[212] "What is a Monastic?," Appendix 1.

[213] Ward, *Sayings*, 86.

[214] Ibid. The meaning of "elder brother" is obscure, but the context suggests a relationship of obedience and accountability, but more equal than that between a monk and his elder. Perhaps it is similar to Kassia's "soul-friend."

[215] "What is a Monastic?," Appendix 1.

Kassia warns against overextending oneself and going beyond the word of instruction, using the text of Ephesians 6:12 ("the struggle is not against blood and flesh"). John Climacus takes up this theme:

> It is not safe for an untried soldier to leave the ranks and take up single combat. Equally, it is dangerous for a monk to undertake the solitary life before he has had plenty of experience and practice in the battle with the passions of the soul. . . . And he who tries to fight unaided against the spirits gets himself killed by them.[216]

Later in the chapter, John asserts that this temptation particularly applies to those new to the monastic life: "The enemy persuades them to look too soon for these virtues, so that they may not persevere and attain them in due time."[217] An aphorism attributed to Abba Poemen, one of the Desert Fathers, puts it succinctly: "Everything that goes to excess comes from the demons."[218]

John Climacus contends that obedience results in a life without fear, since the spiritual father, rather than the monk himself, is responsible to God for the monk's conduct.[219] Kassia's "What is a Monastic?" also proceeds from obedient moderation to the lack of fear, although she enlarges the context with a direct quote from scripture:

> A monk is not he who fears God,
> but loves him, for "perfect
> love casts out fear."[220]

This quotation from 1 John is particularly salient to Kassia's delineation of the qualities of a monastic, given that the same line is used in a famous aphorism attributed to Anthony, the pioneer and paragon of monasticism.[221] Kassia likewise structures her poem "On Monastics" to show that obedience gives rise to a monastic life that

[216] John Climacus, 110.

[217] Ibid., 118-9.

[218] Ward, *Sayings*, 185.

[219] John Climacus, 106-7.

[220] "What is a Monastic?," Appendix 1.

[221] Ward, 8.

is "altogether peaceful . . . [and] . . . absolutely undisturbed."[222] Though her wording is different, the sentiment echoes Climacus once again. He advises that the monk's *nous* must remain "entirely level and motionless,"[223] even in the face of abuse, ridicule, and injustice.

In the next line of "On Monastics," Kassia declares, "A monastic's life is always in stillness" (Μοναχοῦ βίος ἡσύχιος διόλου).[224] While the relationship between peace—the lack of disturbance—and stillness may seem intuitively apparent, the matter is considerably more complicated in the monastic tradition. The term *hesychia* (stillness) acquired a technical meaning in Byzantine monasticism, referring to specifically to contemplative prayer. John Climacus devotes two full chapters of *The Ladder* to the principle of *hesychia*, his twenty-seventh step. However, John notes that his discussion applies only to "the man who practices stillness in the deep places of the heart, while the novice will have no experience or knowledge of it."[225] When Kassia associates perennial stillness in the monastics life, it seems likely that she, too, is speaking of the more advanced monastic, perhaps even a spiritual elder, rather than the novice.

Climacus differentiates between two types of *hesychia*, that of the body and that of the soul. He describes bodily stillness as "acquaintance with and a fixedness of habits and sensory perceptions," while the soul's stillness is an "acquaintance with the thoughts and an inviolate mind."[226] In "On Monastics" Kassia makes this same distinction:

> He is a monastic who has a disciplined tongue.
> He is a monastic whose eye does not wander.
> He is a monastic who has a firmly planted *nous*.[227]

[222] "On Monastics," Appendix 1.
[223] John of Sinai, *Klimax* [*The Ladder*], 86. The Greek reads: μηδέ θραῦσιν ὑπομένοντα, ἀλλ' ὅλον λεῖον καὶ ἀκίνητον ὑπάρχοντα.
[224] "On Monastics," Appendix 1.
[225] John Climacus, 262.
[226] John of Sinai, *Klimax*, 335.
[227] "On Monastics," Appendix 1.

Her poem proceeds naturally from the "eye that does not wander" (fixed sensory perceptions) to the interior spiritual plane when she asserts that the monastic's *nous* is "firmly planted." "What is a Monastic?" likewise describes the monk as firmly planted, although in this case within the context of speechlessness in the face of suffering. She continues to echo Climacus's imagery as she likens stillness to a guard against invading thoughts, placed on the doors of the heart: "A monastic is a door that is not ajar." This careful watch over the thoughts also appears in this line from "What is a Monastic?": "A monk is one who has a concealed *nous*."[228]

In *The Ladder*, stillness is preceded by the step of discernment, which Climacus considers so critical that he again devotes two full chapters to the subject. In describing discernment, he writes: "Among beginners, discernment is real self-knowledge; among those midway along the road to perfection, it is a spiritual capacity to distinguish unfailingly between what is truly good and what in nature is opposed to the good."[229] Kassia also attributes a type of discernment to beginners, i.e., laypeople, in her poem "Man":

> A keenly perceptive man is an excellent seer;
> he recognizes dangers in all affairs.
> A prudent man has mastery over the foolish,
> such a man is ruler over his own passions.[230]

For those intent on perfection, Climacus describes discernment as "knowledge resulting from divine illumination, which with its lamp can light up what is dark in others."[231] Kassia, immediately after describing the monastic as "a door that is not ajar," declares:

> A monastic is steadfastness for the weak
> A monastic is a book of empirical study
> Showing the types and at the same time teaching.
> The life of a monastic is a lamp bringing light to all.
> The life of a monastic is a guide to those wandering.[232]

[228] Appendix 1.
[229] John Climacus, 229.
[230] Tripolitis, 117, with minor adaptation.
[231] John Climacus, 229.
[232] "On Monastics," Appendix 1.

Kassia places great emphasis on the monastic's role in teaching and enlightening others. This emphasis reflects the historical context of the Iconoclast controversy, in which monastics confronted both imperial and ecclesiastical powers in order to defend what ultimately became the orthodox position. More importantly, this theme demonstrates the influence of Theodore the Studite on Kassia's thought. In his own writings, Theodore describes the monastic life as being nothing short of the Christian life, i.e., a model for all Christians.[233] Kassia echoes this sentiment at the end of her "What is a Monastic?" when she concludes: "A monk is the boast of Christians."[234]

An idea commonly voiced in the monastic tradition is that true teaching authority derives from experience, not study. Kassia expresses her sentiments on the issue forcefully in her poem "I Hate": "I hate the one who teaches knowing nothing."[235] In "What is a Monastic?" Kassia further declares, "Only such a one experiencing this [i.e., one who has noetically experienced the heavenly festival] knows [how] to teach, enlighten, and to lead others" to salvation.[236]

Monastic tradition outlines two areas of operation for monastic experience: *praxis*, the practical life, and *theoria*, contemplation. Synkletiki, one of three women whose sayings are recorded in the tradition of the Desert Fathers, expresses the monastic ideal that *praxis* must precede instruction:

> It is dangerous for anyone to teach who has not first been trained in the "practical" life. For if someone who owns a ruined house receives guests there, he does them harm because of the dilapidation of his dwelling. It is the same in the case of someone who has not first built an interior dwelling; he causes loss to those who come.[237]

[233] Schmemann, 212-3.
[234] See Appendix 1 for the implications of the Greek.
[235] Tripolitis, 111. The Greek verb for "to know" implies practical rather than theoretical knowledge.
[236] "What is a Monastic?," Appendix 1.
[237] Ward, *Sayings*, 233.

At first blush, Kassia's emphasis on *theoria* and a more contemplative monasticism might seem at odds with such a sentiment. In passages such as this one, Kassia seems to imply that a true monastic will teach simply by setting an example of spiritual experience:

> A monastic is a book of empirical study
> showing the types and at the same time teaching.

Kassia does not neglect traditional *praxis* through the ascetic virtues, however. For example, she declares: "A monk is a love of fasting, enmity of pleasures."[238] In her hymn commemorating Theodore the Soldier, Kassia extends the principle of fasting more broadly to all the faithful:

> Using the apostate tyrant as his tool,
> the enemy, through a cruel plot,
> attempted to defile the people of God
> as they purified themselves through fasting. . . .[239]

Not only is an ascetic emphasis particularly appropriate for this hymn (Theodore's martyrdom is commemorated at the outset of Lent, a time of abstinence), but one also can detect an Iconophile subtext in the reference to the opposition to "apostate" tyranny.

Byzantine monastic literature recommends fasting in particular as a remedy for lust, but there is little mention of this vice in Kassia's works, perhaps reflecting a feminine perspective on monasticism in contrast to male monastic authors. Nonetheless, struggles of the flesh were not unknown to Kassia, as she indicates:

> To be a monk is a struggle of the flesh,
> according to the saying, "for us the struggle
> is not against blood and flesh." [240]

However, her writings do not emphasize this aspect of monastic life. Lust does appear as a theme in "The woman fallen into many sins" (which may account for the dubious attribution to Kassia of a

[238] "What is a Monastic?," Appendix 1.
[239] Tripolitis, 75.
[240] Ibid.

number of hymns for penitent harlots), but I suggest below that Kassia's primary focus in that hymn is on repentance. Perhaps Kassia found a preemptive remedy for lust in Theodore the Studite's admonition when she was still a young girl: "You will have it in you to extinguish any fleeting and perishable longings. Flee then, flee the gaze of males—even, if proper, the gaze of those who are wise, in case you are smitten or yourself smite."[241]

Kassia celebrates the virtue of chastity in St. John the Baptist, who was a prototype for monastics, describing him as:

> A man by nature, but an angel in his life.
> For he had embraced complete chastity and self-restraint,
> he held that which was according to nature,
> but avoided that which was contrary to nature,
> striving beyond nature.[242]

This hymn echoes themes found both in John Climacus and in Kassia's own gnomic poems on monasticism. In discussing chastity, Climacus writes:

> To be chaste is to put on the nature of an incorporeal being. Chastity is a supernatural denial of what one is by nature, so that a mortal and corruptible body is competing in a truly marvelous way with incorporeal spirits. A chaste man is someone who has driven out bodily love by means of divine love, who has used heavenly fire to quench the fires of the flesh . . . . When nature is overcome, it should be admitted that this is due to Him Who is above nature, since it cannot be denied that the weaker always yields to the stronger.[243]

In her poem defining a monastic, Kassia utilizes similar imagery. In the first of these two stanzas, she actually quotes verbatim from *The Ladder*:

> A monk is one who has attained to the rank and status
> of the bodiless ones
> in a body material and foul.

[241] Silvas, 34-5.
[242] Tripolitis, 51.
[243] John Climacus, 171-2.

> A monk is, preeminently and authoritatively,
> an angel on the earth and a celestial man.[244]

Thus, for Kassia, chastity is a practice necessary to acquiring an incorporeal nature while still in the flesh.

Although the *Lives* of the monastic saints tend to emphasize their ascetic feats and wonderworking, the major theme of the monastic life is repentance. Indeed, it occupies the first place in *The Ladder* after obedience, indicating that it is a foundational monastic virtue, opening up the possibility of the incorporeal or "angelic" life.[245] The centrality of repentance is the main reason why the monastic habit is black.[246] Kassia's omission of repentance in her gnomic works on monasticism may indicate that she simply assumed commitment to this virtue on the part of a monastic reader, and therefore directed her poetry toward more contemplative matters. However, she does emphasize repentance extensively in her hymnography, which was written for a lay as well as a monastic audience. Like Theodore the Studite, her spiritual father, Kassia likely viewed monasticism as the Christian life par excellence. Thus, she represents repentance as the universal goal of Christians rather than an endeavor exclusive to the monastic experience.

Without question Kassia's most famous liturgical composition is her *doxastikon* for Holy Wednesday Orthros, popularly known today as the Hymn of Kassiani. This composition draws upon the text of Luke 7:36-50 to offer a deeply evocative expression of penitence:

> The woman who had fallen into many sins, perceiving Thy divinity, O Lord, fulfilled the part of a myrrh-bearer; and with lamentations she brought sweet-smelling oil of myrrh to Thee before Thy burial. "Woe is me," she said, "for night surrounds me, dark and moonless, and stings my lustful passion with the love of sin. Accept the fountain of my tears, O Thou who drawest down from the clouds the waters of the sea. Incline to

[244] "What is a Monastic?" Appendix 1.
[245] John Climacus,131.
[246] Ibid., 138.

the groaning of my heart, O Thou who in Thine ineffable self-emptying hast bowed down the heaven...[247]

In Kassia's philosophy, penitence and mourning are intimately linked to such a degree that she, unlike Climacus, seems to make no real distinction between the two. Her hymn written for the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee, also associated with the start of the penitential period of Lent, expresses her thought on the value of mournful tears:

Almighty Lord, I know how great is the power of tears.
For they brought back Hezekiah from the gates of death;
They delivered the sinful woman from many years of transgressions;
They justified the Publican above the Pharisee.
And I implore, number me among them: have mercy on me.[248]

Although the "sinful woman" appears in virtually every recitation of penitential archetypes found in Byzantine hymnography, the inclusion of this figure, famous for her tears, may have been especially meaningful to Kassia. This is not to imply, as some have asserted, that she herself was a "fallen woman," but simply that Kassia's very life as a nun was devoted to the principle of repentance.

In summary, Kassia's relationship with monasticism appears to have developed in her childhood, to judge by Theodore the Studite's letters. There is little evidence to suggest that she turned to it as a "consolation prize" after her rejection at Theophilos's bride-show, as some of the Byzantine chronicles and not a few modern scholars have suggested. As an intellectually gifted abbess, Kassia wrote with subtlety on the theological issues of the day, including the Incarnational theology at stake in the Iconoclast era, but also positioned herself as something of a monastic philosopher. By examining her writings, especially her gnomic poems on monasticism, we gain a sense of how she approached monastic life. She drew heavily on the traditions she had received from the text of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* and from her spiritual father, Theodore the

[247] Mary and Ware, *Lenten Triodion*, 540.

[248] Tripolitis, 73. See also hymns for Eudokia of the Samarians, Pelagia, and Mary of Egypt (Tripolitis, 45, 7, and 49, respectively).

Studite. However, she emphasized a contemplative, hesychastic monasticism rather than one of bodily *praxis*. Perhaps Kassia herself best summarizes her philosophy with these verses at the end of the poem "On Monastics":

The life of a monastic is only for the glory of God.
The best order of things for everyone beginning
or ending any deed or speech
is to make God the beginning and the end.[249]

[249] "On Monastics," Appendix 1.

5 KASSIA THE PERSON

Grant me until death not to envy,

but grant me to be envied for this I long for,

to be envied by all in sacred works.

Kassia, "Envy"

Up to this point, we have examined several attributes—noblewoman, feminist, Iconophile, monastic—that help explain *what*, but not *who*, Kassia was. At a distance of 1200 years, we can easily forget that Kassia was a living, breathing person. Although biographical data is scant and only a portion of her writings has survived, her personality shines through her non-liturgical poems, in particular. At the very least, we can conclude that Kassia was a highly educated and intellectually gifted woman. She was also strongly opinionated: an author who wrote a poem whose every line begins "I hate" was not shy in expressing her likes and dislikes. Working on the assumption that the recurring themes in her works represent issues that were most important to her (or perhaps those sins that she, as a nun, personally found most vexing), we can reconstruct some further aspects of Kassia's personality. Such an approach, while admittedly speculative, is nonetheless useful in our attempt to understand and appreciate Kassia as a person.

KASSIA AND FRIENDSHIP

Kassia was a strong proponent of religious orthodoxy in general, as well as a partisan in the controversy over icons in the ninth century. For example, she celebrates the value of orthodox belief in her vesperal *sticheron* for Gregory of Nyssa, praising him for "all-wisely

setting forth the same Godhead of the Trinity, whence also the limits of orthodox dogmas, provoking the foreign heresies to war, rousing the power of the Faith."[250] Likewise, Kassia seems to have placed a high value on proper belief—which she equates with a life rooted in Christ—as the necessary basis for social relationships. Her poem "Friendship" opens on this note:

> For two [not] holding friendship in Christ dear
> concord is not possible, but rather exceeding strife.[251]

She regards any type of interpersonal discord as fundamentally sinful and a departure from God: "I hate a quarrelsome person, for he loves not the divine ordinance."[252]

One of Kassia's epigrams extends the idea that relationships lacking a commitment to shared values must be avoided: "The person acquiring knavery-hating judgment altogether cannot be with evil people."[253] She is equally harsh in her treatment of fools ("I hate the fool supposing to be a philosopher.")[254] In "Stupidity," Kassia upholds intelligence as another criterion for friendships:

> A prudent person is not able to live with stupid people,
> For he will weaken because of the opposition of these;
> Truly, how does one prevail over the audacity of these people?[255]

[250] Translation mine. The Greek (Tripolitis, 34) reads: Τριάδος τὸ ὁμόθεον πανσόφως ἐκτιθέμενος / ὅθεν καὶ ἐν ὀρθοδόξοις δόγμασι / τὸ κράτος τὸ τῆς Πίστεως / ἐν τοῖς πέρασιν ἤγειρας. One might point out, too, that ἤγειρας is a wordplay on the name Gregory in Greek.

[251] Translation mine. The Greek (Tripolitis, 106) reads: Δύο φιλούντων τὴν ἐν Χριστῷ φιλίαν / ἰσασμὸς οὐκ ἔνεστιν, ἀλλ' ἔρις μᾶλλον

[252] Translation mine, which fails to convey the wordplay of the Greek. The Greek (Tripolitis, 112) reads: Μισῶ φίλεχθρον οὐ γὰρ φιλεῖ θεῖον.

[253] Translation mine. The Greek (Tripolitis, 134) reads: Κακοῖς συνεῖναι πάμπαν οὐκ ἐξισχύει / ὁ κεκτημένος μισοπόνηρον γνώμην.

[254] Tripolitis, 111.

[255] Translation mine. The Greek (Tripolitis, 126) reads: Μωροῖς φρόνιμος συνδιάγειν οὐ σθένει · / ἀτονήσει γὰρ τῇ τούτων ἀντιθέσει, / ἢ πῶς τὴν τούτων θρασύτητα νικήσοι;

Here, she makes it clear that she does not advocate avoiding certain kinds of people out of intolerance, but because they may negatively affect ("weaken") one's own character. We do not know if Kassia consistently made such choices, or is speaking regretfully from personal experience, but her strength of character is certainly apparent.

However, Kassia does not always come across as intolerant of others' weaknesses, but sometimes just the opposite. A surprising personality trait appears upon examination of Kassia's works: her sensitivity and supportive nature. As noted in the chapter on monasticism, her use of the term "soul-friends" (σύμψυχοι) hints at a capacity for genuine intimacy. In "I Hate," Kassia declares with typical zeal, "I hate the one who does not encourage everyone with words."[256] Kassia credits the martyr Natalia with offering the encouragement that enabled her husband to overcome fear of martyrdom and achieve sainthood:

> O God-inspired words
> of the wise Natalia!
> O divine exhortation that tore apart the heavens,
> and brought the esteemed disciple Adrian
> to the very throne of the great King![257]

Her reflections on the nature of friendship indicate that its sharing is bilateral:

> A friend sharing his sufferings with his dearest friends
> Finds relaxation from extreme distress.
> . . . . . .
> A friend who becomes exalted will elevate his friends along with him.[258]

Whence came such sensitivity on Kassia's part? Theodore the Studite was surely a role model: he uses a thoroughly encouraging tone in *Letter* 270 and he extends to her his "prayer and encouragement" as recompense for her service to the monks.[259] Perhaps

[256] Tripolitis, 113.

[257] Ibid., 71.

[258] Ibid., 107, 109.

[259] Silvas, 34, 35-6.

such experiences in her own youth gave her an understanding of the value of encouragement, and a desire to extend it to others.

KASSIA'S REACTION TO BEAUTY AND WEALTH

One could easily dismiss the chroniclers' praise of Kassia's beauty as mere typology, save for the frequency with which beauty recurs in her own writings. Theodore the Studite's admonition in *Letter* 142 implies that she was a beautiful young woman: "Since [Christ's] beauty has flashed into your heart, you will have it in you to extinguish any fleeting and perishable longings. Flee then, flee the gaze of males—even, if proper, the gaze of those who are wise, in case you are smitten or yourself smite."[260]

Byzantine culture associated beauty with goodness and virtue, and Kassia's hymnography often reflects this standard paradigm. The hymn of the Great Martyr Christina that is attributed to Kassia expresses a more conventional approach to beauty:

> Christ, the King of Glory,
> Fascinated by your maidenly beauty
> Joined you to him as an unblemished bride in a pure union.[261]

Other compositions, however, make it clear that she did not passively equate beauty and virtue, but carefully scrutinized these ideals to determine their relative moral worth. For example, Kassia contrasts the Martyr Eugenios's youthful beauty (ὡραῖος τῇ μορφῇ), with his dazzling wisdom (γνώμῃ ὑπέρλαμπρος), clearly preferring the latter. One suspects that this was no mere poetic contrast, but that Kassia minimized the value of her own beauty, preferring that others appreciate her for her intellectual and spiritual attributes. Theodore the Studite certainly did so, confirming in *Letter* 270 that Kassia indeed possessed unusual wisdom while yet in the flower of youth, nothing that she had "once more . . . expressed to us things so wise and understanding, that it is right for me to be astonished and give thanks to the Lord when I see such knowledge in a maiden lately sprung."[262]

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[260] Silvas, 34.
[261] Tripolitis, 61.
[262] Silvas, 35.

Kassia's gnomic works also reflect a mind occupied with the pros and cons of external beauty. Kassia does acknowledge that "beauty has its consolation," but she frankly declares in her poem "Woman" that

> It is not good for a woman to be beautiful;
> for beauty is distracting.[263]

Theodore the Studite's admonition that she "flee the gaze of males" certainly suggests the nature of the distractions she had in mind. Furthermore, Kassia notes that beauty can have other negative effects, since "the beginning of envy is the good fortune of the beautiful."[264] In her poem "Beauty," Kassia provides this assessment: "A drop of good fortune is, of course, to be preferred / to having too excessive physical beauty."[265] She goes on to declare that beauty (and wealth) alone cannot engender moral goodness:

> To acquire grace from the Lord is better
> than beauty and wealth, which do not beget grace.[266]

Kassia asserts that moral agency is of more importance than a passive attribute like beauty. In her poem "Man," she enhances the critique of beauty in "Woman" by presenting an exceedingly unattractive protagonist. "Bald, dumb, one-handed, with a speech impediment, both short and swarthy, lame and cross-eyed," he responds to the insults of a wicked man by proclaiming:

> I am not the cause of my misfortunes;
> for in no way did I want to be like this,
> but you are in part the cause of your faults,
> as you did not receive from the creator
> these things that you do, endure, and dignify.[267]

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[263] Tripolitis, 121.
[264] From the poem "Envy," Tripolitis, 122, translation mine.
[265] Translation mine. The Greek, based on Tripolitis, 120, reads: Ῥανίδα τύχης εἰκότως αἱρετέον / ἢ κάλλος μορφῆς ἄγαν ἐξημμένον.
[266] From the poem "Beauty," Tripolitis 120, translation mine. The Greek reads: Χάριν κεκτῆσθαι κρεῖττον παρὰ κυρίου / ἤπερ ἀχαρίτωτον κάλλος καὶ πλοῦτον.

Again, Kassia makes it clear that she regards interior character as infinitely more important than physical appearances. While she does not reject conventional attitudes out of hand, she presents her audience with a nuanced and sophisticated reflection. At the same time, she provides us with a glimpse into her experience as a beautiful (and perhaps highly sought after) woman who chose to reject these advantages and dedicate herself to the monastic life.

If Kassia had personal reasons for critically examining the drawbacks of physical beauty, she appears to have had an even more complicated relationship with material wealth. Kassia was an aristocrat with an excellent education who apparently possessed the necessary capital to found her own monastery. Christian tradition, of course, has always maintained a skeptical attitude toward wealth, beginning with the biblical warning: "For the love of money is a root of all evils, by which some, reaching out for themselves, were led astray from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."[268] Theodore the Studite advises Kassia to consider the inconstancy of earthly happiness based on wealth: "For gold and silver, fame and a pleasant life, and all that it seems good to have among earthly things, are in no way among the beautiful, even if so called, since such things are ephemeral and perishing, dreamlike and shadowy."[269] Ephraim the Monk's *Chronikon* credits Kassia with taking this advice to heart, describing her as obtaining:

> Neither a husband nor an earthly king
> [instead] noetic riches and an omnipotent Bridegroom
> and an allotment from the King of the Heavens. . . .[270]

Her hymn for the Great Martyr Christina expresses a similar sentiment:

[267] Tripolitis, 117.
[268] 1 Tim 6:10.
[269] *Letter* 270, in Silvas, 35.
[270] Ephraim the Monk, *Chronikon*. Translation mine from the Greek in Rochow, 8-9: οὐ νυμφίου τε γηγενοῦς βασιλέως / πλουτεῖ νοητὸν παντάνακτα νυμφίον / καί βασιλέως οὐρανῶν κληρουχίαν. . . . Cf. the *Chronikon* of John Zonaras.

> Leaving the wealth of her family and longing sincerely for
> Christ,
> the martyr found heavenly glory and riches. . . .[271]

Kassia, although not a martyr in the conventional sense, does seem to affirm here her choice to leave behind "the wealth of her family" in order to pursue the monastic life and fulfill her own "longing for Christ."

Another hymn, this one definitely Kassia's composition, goes so far as to equate wealth with the "yoke" of slavery. Kassia praises the Evangelist Matthew,

> for he flung
> off the yoke and the gold of the publican,
> and followed Christ, and as herald of the Gospel
> had dealings only with the divine. . . .[272]

Her gnomic poem "Wealth/Poverty" further elaborates on the tyrannical nature of wealth. As in her ruminations on friendship, Kassia concerns herself with the preservation of one's moral and spiritual integrity.

> Do not seek after riches or after poverty on the other hand;
> for the one puffs up the *nous* and the *gnosis*
> while the other holds unending grief.
> The one who has wealth without giving to another,
> insofar as he is prosperous, is plainly unfortunate
> [because] in guarding this he brings destruction to his soul.[273]

[271] Tripolitis, 58-9; cf. a hymn for Eudokia in Tripolitis, 45.
[272] Ibid., 11.
[273] "Wealth/Poverty," translation mine. The Greek (Tripolitis, 118) reads: Πλοῦτον μὴ ζήτει, μηδ' αὖ πάλιν πενίαν · / ὁ μὲν γὰρ τὸν νοῦν φυσιοῖ καὶ τὴν γνῶσιν, / ἡ δὲ τὴν λύπην ἀκατάπυστον ἔχει. / Ὁ πλοῦτον ἔχων καὶ μὴ διδοὺς ἑτέρῳ, / ἐν οἷς εὐτυχεῖ, δυστυχεῖ δηλονότι / εἰς ψυχικὸν φυλάττων ὄλεθρον τοῦτον. I chose to leave *nous* and *gnosis* untranslated because of the sheer difficulty in adequately expressing the spiritual connotations of these terms in English. There are a number of echoes of New Testament texts in this, including 1 Cor 8:1, Col 2:8, and Lk 12:16-23. Such echoes may be incidental, resulting from Kassia's environment rich with biblical texts in monastic services and reading, rather than conscious allusions.

She identifies the negative consequences of wealth firstly in a distortion of one's inner spiritual perception (the *nous*), and secondly in a tendency toward anxiety that leads to stinginess.

The first point demonstrates Kassia's subtle and profound understanding of spirituality, which, as we saw in the previous chapter, relies upon a sound *nous* and the practice of discernment. In "I Hate," she indicates the disastrous impact of greed on the faculty of *gnosis* (γνῶσις), which governs moral discernment: "I hate the hard-hearted (ἀγνώμονα) man so like Judas."[274] She states the relative merits of wealth elsewhere in blunt terms and continues her emphasis on prudent associations:

> It is better to be poor with sensible people
> than to be rich with stupid and ignorant ones.[275]

Another line from "Wealth/Poverty" asserts her view that wealth distorts a person's spiritual insight and sensibilities: "Wealth covers the greatest of evils, but poverty strips all evils naked."[276] In other words, while the stresses of abject poverty (πτωχεία) serve to expose a person's weaknesses and passions, wealth fosters a dangerous kind of self-deception. Furthermore, wealth gives rise to arrogance and wicked acts, as several of Kassia's other gnomic works suggest.[277]

The greatest danger is that the wealthy person "brings destruction to his soul."[278] Kassia's "Friendship" hints at the dire consequences of such a state in its stark conclusion:

> Wealth without friends
> is a dark dwelling place in which there is no joy.[279]

[274] Translation mine. The Greek (Tripolitis, 112) reads: Μισῶ τὸν ἀγνώμα καθὼς Ἰούδαν.

[275] From the poem "Stupidity," Tripolitis, 127.

[276] Tripolitis, 119.

[277] Kassia's rather offensive analysis of Armenians (Tripolitis, 114, 115), for example, suggests such a relationship.

[278] εἰς ψυχικὸν . . . ὄλεθρον, which Tripolitis translates "in mental anguish."

[279] Tripolitis, 109.

Kassia's evaluation of these psychic distortions brought on by wealth is in keeping with the mindset of the Fathers of the Church.[280] Although such self-justification may not have been her primary aim, these poems also afford insight into why a woman of Kassia's material advantages would choose to pursue a monastic life of voluntary poverty.

The second concern Kassia raises is that anxiety over wealth can lead to stinginess—an excuse for not fulfilling the gospel command to be charitable. She expresses no more tolerance for misers than she does for fools:

> I hate a rich man moaning as a beggar.
> . . . . . .
> I hate a miser and especially a wealthy one.[281]

Indeed, her poem "Man" contrasts the positive attributes that define a male (ἀνὴρ) with the negative attributes of a miser (φειδωλὸς) in such a way as to suggest that stinginess is emasculating. This literary construction raises interesting (and perhaps unanswerable) questions about her philosophy of gender.

Kassia further points out the practical repercussions of stinginess in these verses that link it to hypocrisy, another quality she abhorred:

> A miser seeing his friend hides from sight
> and teaches his household to lie.
> A miser avoids the entertainment of friends.
> A miser depresses all his poor friends.[282]

[280] John Chrysostom, for example, asserts that the wealthy man "lives the life of Cain, groaning and trembling on the earth even when no one knows. Inside he has fire always concentrated." "First Sermon on Lazarus and the Rich Man," in *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981), 34-5.

[281] Translation mine. The Greek (Tripolitis, 110, 112) reads: Μισῶ πλούσιον ὡς πτωχὸν θρηνῳδοῦντα. / ... Μισῶ φειδωλὸν καὶ μάλιστα πλοθτοῦντα.

[282] Tripolitis, 119.

The first line of "Wealth/Poverty" expresses similar sentiments, noting that money has no real meaning apart from lasting and genuine relationships:

> When you become wealthy, increase your friends with your wealth,
> so that if you become poor, they might not fall away.[283]

While this advice seems to apply mainly to worldly social relationships, such a reading grossly underestimates Kassia's depth as a thinker and her talent as a writer. The Parable of the Wise Steward (Lk 16:1-13) indicates that a prudent use of wealth, i.e., generosity in almsgiving, enables the Christian to become friends with the poor—the terms Kassia uses in these particular verses refer particularly to beggars—who in turn represent Christ Himself (Mt 25:35-46). Theodore the Studite suggests in *Letter* 142 that Kassia accrued such intangible benefits by her generosity to the monk Dorotheos: "Do you know what it is you do? You participate with him in the struggle of his contest."[284]

According to Kassia's analysis, wealth is not wicked in itself. The real danger, noted above, lies in "not giving to another."[285] As with beauty, the moral value of wealth is determined neither by the world, nor by the friends it helps one win, but by the interior disposition of the person who possesses it. As she notes in one of her epigrams, the spiritual outcome of external circumstances ultimately depends upon individual choice: "The unfortunate man, finding a gold piece, seizes it and incurs danger therefrom, but a fortunate man, even finding a living serpent, turns this into profit and gain."[286]

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[283] Ibid.

[284] Silvas, 34. Theodore's language is evocative of early Christian martyrologies.

[285] Tripolitis, 119.

[286] Translation mine. The Greek (Tripolitis, 132) reads: Εὑρὼν δυστυχὴς χρυσίον εἶλε τοῦτο / καὶ γέγονε κίνδυνος ἐκ τούτου τούτῳ · / ὁ δ᾽ εὐτυχὴς, κἂν ὄφιν εὑρῃ ζῶντα, / εἰς ὄφελος γίνεται τούτῳ καὶ κέδρος. The similarities between this epigram and "Wealth/Poverty" suggest a relationship between the two compositions. The epigram also demonstrates Kassia's sophistication as a poet. Several elements are also reminiscent of Scripture.

KASSIA ON ENVY

It is difficult, of course, to assess the extent to which envy affected Kassia's life. Given that she was beautiful, wealthy, educated, and exceptionally intelligent—and a gifted writer whom Theodore the Studite considered superior to her male contemporaries—it is reasonable to speculate that she attracted the envy of others. We do know that she devoted an entire poem to the topic, which is presented here in its entirety:

> Just as a viper rends the one who gave birth to it,
> so envy rends the envious person.
> The beginning of envy is the good fortune of the beautiful;
> envy meets with disaster, gaining nothing.
> The heart of an envious man rages.
> Drive out every element of envy;
> "Death," I declare and envy bears this;
> for murder many times results from envy.
> Envy most-evil, who bore you, tell me,
> and who can smite and utterly break you?
> Without doubt vainglory gives birth to me,
> while obviously brotherly love smites me,
> the fear of God ultimately causes me to withdraw,
> and humility altogether breaks me.
> Christ, grant me until death not to envy,
> but grant me to be envied for this I long for,
> to be envied by all in sacred works.
> Everyone who is envious first shows malice;
> for malice begets envy.

The poem's personification of envy, and the dialogical approach to its origins and remedies, strongly echoes the treatment John Climacus afforded the vices in his *Ladder*. One possibility is that Kassia, like John, used her writings to instruct members of her own monastic community, and that she saw particular reason to warn against the evils of envy. Kassia's word choices underscore the consequences of envy in her thought. To capture envy's destructive power, she uses the verb ῥήσσω in the first two lines, which I translate as "to rend." Her repetition of this verb conveys the effect that envy has on relationships—that is, envy divides, rather than unites, a concern for a monastic community as well as for friendships of a more personal nature. She strikes this same

destructive note again a few lines later—"who can smite and utterly break (διαρρήσσω) you?"—to depict the violent effort required to defeat envy.

Very near the end of the poem, Kassia inserts a first-person narrator who pleads that she not be envied for beauty, wealth, and worldly things that pass away, but rather for her "sacred works" (ἔργοις θείοις). The use of this term is consonant with a context in which she might be exhorting nuns in her care to strive with one another for holiness. (In her poem "Friendship," she declares that "a friend who becomes exalted will raise up his friends along with him.")[287] However, it may also give us a glimpse of Kassia's own priorities in life: not only does the narrator consider inner character more important than outward attributes, but she wishes to be remembered (envied) for "works" of a religious nature—an aspiration that Kassia fulfilled as a hymnographer who was ultimately glorified as a saint.

KASSIA'S REFLECTIONS ON SPEECH AND SILENCE

Kassia was a harsh critic of the misuse of the faculty of speech, and devoted considerable attention in her writings to the need to control the tongue. Silence and reserve were deemed appropriate virtues for a Byzantine woman, as discussed in the chapter on "Kassia the Feminist." However, one suspects that Kassia, gifted with a well-developed intellect, found speech and its accompanying dangers to be a particularly salient topic. Her encounter with the emperor at his bride-show certainly suggests that she suffered from a wit that occasionally outpaced her better judgment. In describing the character of monasticism, Kassia emphatically declares that "a monastic . . . has a disciplined tongue."[288] Her hymn for Mary of Egypt recommends the discipline of silence—"the reproaches of

[287] Tripolitis, 109.

[288] "On Monastics," Appendix 1, cp. her definition: "He is a monk who has a hallowed *nous* and a cleansed mouth" in "What is a Monastic?," also in Appendix 1.

memory / thou didst choke by means of the silence of asceticism."[289]

In her approach to sins of the tongue, Kassia broadly follows themes developed in John Climacus's *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, especially his steps ten, eleven, and twelve: "On Slander," "On Talkativeness and Silence," and "On Falsehood." In his chapter on talkativeness, John writes:

> Talkativeness is the throne of vainglory on which it loves to preen itself and show off. Talkativeness is a sign of ignorance, a doorway to slander, a leader of jesting, a servant of lies, the ruin of compunction, a summoner of despondency, a messenger of sleep, a dissipation of recollection, the end of vigilance, the cooling of zeal, the darkening of prayer.[290]

Although there seems to be no direct textual connection between Kassia and John, she addresses talkativeness in a similar style, calling it boldness:

> Boldness is the mother of ignorance;
> boldness is derived from equality
> for it is beyond the limit of equality and the rule.[291]

Kassia displays wry wit here as well as her sophisticated use of language. Rather like Gregory of Nazianzus, she presents an invented etymology that creates parallels based on sounds. This approach allows her to express irony: boldness (talking too much) interferes with the acquisition of knowledge, because it implies equality with the teacher when, in fact, learning depends on listening humbly to one's teacher. In a sense, Kassia expresses succinctly what John Climacus had to say in *The Ladder*: talkativeness is a sign of ignorance and hubris.

[289] Translation mine. The Greek (Tripolitis, 48) reads: τὰ τῆς ἐννοίας ἐγκλήματα / τῇ σιγῇ τῆς ἀσκήσεως ἀπέπνιξας.

[290] John Climacus, 158.

[291] This is an especially difficult passage, so there could be alternative understandings. The Greek reads: Ἀπαιδευσίας μήτηρ ἡ παρρησία · παρρησία λέγεται παρὰ τὸ ἴσον · πέρα γὰρ ἐστι τοῦ ἴσου καὶ τοῦ μέτρου.

Another sin of the tongue that Kassia singles out is slander, Climacus's tenth step. In "Friendship," she reasons: "If you want to love and to be loved completely, keep away from slanderers and the envious."[292] We know too little of Kassia's life to be certain that the topic of slander had personal resonance for her. However, Theodore the Studite seems to suggest that Kassia had falsely accused him in a letter—and worse, that she did so in a tone of false humility:

> Your honour['s letter] was a long time coming, and it is accusatory at that: in one way displaying humility, and in another rising up against our nothingness, just as they do who hurl simply and without proof those accusations against you—and they too who are among your nearest and dearest.[293]

Theodore further indicates that Kassia herself was slandered at the hands of her own family. We do not know the content or context of that slander (though I suggest in the chapter on monasticism that it may have been related to Kassia's participation in the bride-show), but Theodore's tone implies that Kassia was personally wounded by the accusations. Perhaps that earlier event and this rebuke from her spiritual father fixed her mind on the harmful consequences of slander, which "put[s] on a show of doing one thing—and then act[s] otherwise," according to Climacus.[294]

Falsehood and hypocrisy form another unifying motif throughout Kassia's gnomic poetry. If there is a single theme to her poem, "I Hate," it is disdain for hypocrisy. Kassia likewise expresses a disdain for false appearances in her poem "Friendship":

> Let him be called a friend who is without guile,
> while he who is with guile is not a friend, but your enemy.[295]

Among the more specific types of false speech that Kassia cites are flattery and the swearing of oaths. She warns:

[292] Tripolitis, 107.
[293] Silvas, 35.
[294] John Climacus, 155.
[295] Translation mine. The Greek (Tripolitis, 106) reads: φίλος λεγέσθω ὁ φιλῶν ἄνευ δόλου, / ὁ δ᾽ σύν δόλῳ οὐ φίλος, ἀλλ᾽ ἐχθρός σοι.

> The affectation of flatterers is like a painted suit of armor;
> for it commends you with deceptive delights.[296]

She wrote many epigrams warning against the swearing of oaths, but one of the clearest is: "Anyone who swears a lot falls into perjury."[297] Furthermore, she associates the swearing of oaths with contentiousness:

> Every contentious individual also multiplies oaths;
> every contentious individual improperly uses anger.[298]

She flatly declares, "I hate the liar affecting a solemn air with words."[299]

Consistent with the Church Fathers, Kassia offers this standard solution to the dangers of the tongue:

> It is better to keep silence than to chat about things that are not meet.
> For from silence there is no danger, no reproach,
> no regret, no accusation, no oath.[300]

In "On Monastics," Kassia further equates silence with the "disciplined tongue" and "a door that is not ajar."[301] Kassia did not advocate silence in all circumstances, however, even for monastics. She declares:

> A monk is the one remaining firmly planted
> in speechlessness up to the end in both
> distress and also in painful things
> if the anguish is [merely] physical.[302]

The last line suggests that certain conditions merit breaking one's silence—for example, if one's "anguish" is of a spiritual nature.

[296] Tripolitis, 129.
[297] Ibid., 131.
[298] Ibid., 133.
[299] Ibid., 111.
[300] Translation mine. The Greek (Tripolitis, 131) reads: Κρεῖσσον σιωπᾶν ἢ λαλεῖν ἃ μὴ θέμις. / ἐκ σιωπῆς γὰρ οὐ κίνδυνος, οὐ μῶμος, / οὐ μετάμελος, οὐκ ἔγκλησις, οὐχ ὅρκος.
[301] See Appendix 1.
[302] "What is a Monastic?," Appendix 1.

Given the monastic context of the poem and her life, she probably regarded it as spiritually dangerous for a monk or nun to keep silent about tormenting thoughts and passions, which according to monastic tradition were to be confessed to a spiritual father or mother.

In her declarations of hate, Kassia expresses a conviction that silence can be either right or wrong, depending upon the external circumstances. In some cases, silence may connote tacit approval ("conformity") of views that should be opposed:

> I hate the verbose in an unsuitable time.
> I hate silence, when it is a time for speaking.
> I hate the one who conforms to all ways.[303]

In the chapter on Iconoclasm, I suggest that Kassia directed this sentiment at people like Empress Theodora, who refused publicly to condemn Theophilos' position. In light of her staunch position in that controversy, such a criticism on her part is hardly surprising. Kassia, however, applied this philosophy to herself as well: she rejected passive, "conformist" silence by openly supporting the Iconophile cause at considerable personal cost. As a writer, she gave voice to the orthodox (Iconophile) perspective through her hymns and poems composed during or shortly after the time of political turmoil. In an age and a society when women were to be silent, Kassia was not. As a result, her writings provide us with a unique female voice in history that has endured long after the controversies of the ninth century have faded.

CONCLUSIONS ON KASSIA'S PERSONALITY

As a hymnographer, Kassia is celebrated for her piety and profound expressions of religious devotion. We also have noted in earlier chapters her wit (in the bride-show exchange), her incisive and outspoken views on gender, her fierce loyalty to the orthodox cause (Iconophilism), and her emphasis on the interior life in her philosophy of monasticism. A careful reading of her gnomic poems

[303] "I Hate," Tripolitis, 111.

and epigrams, however, suggests further dimensions of a complex and multi-faceted personality.

Kassia took an uncompromising attitude toward hypocrisy and falsehood and appears intolerant of those people she considered stumbling blocks to a productive and virtuous life, placing the ignorant and superficial in that category along with the deceitful. While her strident tone in part reflects the didacticism of epigrams and Greek gnomic poetry in general, we definitely get the impression that Kassia, no matter how admirable her intelligence, was not an easy person to live with. She comes across as impatient, acerbic, and (based partly on Theodore's comments in *Letter* 270) perhaps a bit self-righteous.

At the same time, she appears to harbor a real desire for supportive bonds with others, advocating friendships in which both parties encourage and elevate one another spiritually. She often stresses the importance of harmonious relationships free of strife and bickering. The conclusion of "I hate" indicates her disdain for pettiness: "I hate the one quibbling with friends in vain."[304] Although one imagines that Kassia emerged on the winning side of most arguments, such laments suggest that she did not consider perennial conflict a desirable state. Despite her obvious strength of character, she demonstrates little inclination to impose her views (or her position, for that matter) forcefully on others.

Kassia outlined the risks posed by the worldly adornments of wealth and beauty, yet her philosophical perspective does not reject either out of hand. She acknowledged the misfortunes that befall the poor and unattractive, on the one hand, and the spiritual benefits that wealth can yield when directed toward charity, on the other. Although one would hesitate to call her a moderate in her views, neither was she an extremist—she appears in her writings to be constantly seeking, if not a golden mean, at least an appropriate balance. She had no qualms in using strong language to make a point (for example, an entire poem in which every line begins "I hate"), but she tended to season her more emotional appeals with

[304] Translation mine. The Greek (Tripolitis, 112) reads: Μισῶ τὸν μάτην συκοφαντοῦντα φίλους. Elsewhere in the poem Kassia declared her hate for "a quarrelsome one, for he does not love the holy."

the calm of reason and her intellectual arguments with sympathetic emotion.

Although she herself was highly articulate, even outspoken, she was a harsh critic of the misuse of the faculty of speech. She knew words (especially oaths, lies, and slander) could wound, and the bride-show story coupled with Theodore's letter suggesting that she been on the giving, as well as the receiving, end of such hurtful exchanges suggest that there may have been a rueful undertone to her moralizing. Certainly, her plea that Christ "grant me until death not to envy" suggests that Kassia at times saw herself struggling against her own demons and vices, not merely taking others to task from a detached philosophical distance.

Throughout this work, I contend that Kassia is properly understood as a theologian and philosopher—truly, a Mother of the Church. We can appreciate her keen intellectual, spiritual insights, and poetic gifts while recognizing that Kassia viewed herself as a work in progress. The clues that we glean about Kassia's personality suggest that she had little use for self-aggrandizement, but rather pushed herself constantly in pursuit of her own ideals. In the end, it may be precisely that striving after perfection—as opposed to her actual achievement of it—that holds the key to what is perhaps her least understood, yet most illustrious, appellation: saint.

APPENDIX 1: KASSIA'S POEMS ON MONASTICISM

Although monastic themes recur throughout Kassia's corpus, she wrote two poems specifically about monastics, which are provided here in the Greek with original English translations. In these poems, Kassia presents an idealized vision, to be sure, rather than the workaday life of a monastic. There are a number of features of Kassia's poems on monasticism that merit comment. First, she uses the term masculine term *monachos* as a generic term for a monastic of either sex. Second, the repetitive phrase *monachos esti* echoes the rhetoric of the sixth-century abbot John Climacus, whose *Ladder of Divine Ascent* is a virtual instruction manual for the monastic life in the Byzantine tradition. For the sake of minimizing awkwardness in English, I have sometimes rendered this phrase "he is a monastic," despite the generic use of the term monastic. Third, the English translation here reflects technical uses of terms such as *nous* and *hesychia*, which are specific to the monastic context.

Περὶ μοναχῶν

Μοναχός ἐστιν ἑαυτόν ἔχων.
Μοναχός ἐστί μονολόγιστος βίος
Μοναχός ἔχων βιωτικὰς φροντίδας
οὗτος πολλοστός, οὐ μοναχός κεκλήσθω.
Μοναχοῦ βίος κουφότερος ὀρνέου.
Μοναχοῦ βίος περιεργίας ἄνευ.
Μοναχοῦ βίος εἰρηνικὸς διόλου.
Μοναχοῦ βίος ἀτάραχος καθάπαξ.
Μοναχοῦ βίος ἡσύχιος διόλου.
Μοναχός ἐστί πεπαιδευμένη γλῶττα.
Μοναχός ἐστί μὴ πλανώμενον ὄμμα
Μοναχός ἐστί νοῦς κατεστηριγμένος.
Μοναχός ἐστιν ἀπαράοικτος θύρα.
Μοναχός ἐστί στηριγμὸς ἀστηρίκτων.
Μοναχός ἐστί καθίστορον βιβλίον
δεικνύον ὁμοῦ τοὺς τύπους καὶ διδάσκον.

Βίος μοναστοῦ λύχνος φαίνων τοῖς πᾶσι.

Βίος <μονα>στοῦ ὁδηγὸς πλανωμένων.

Βίος μοναστοῦ φυγαδευτὴς δαιμόνων.
Βίος μοναστοῦ θερα<π>ευτὴς ἀγγέλλων.
Βίος μοναστοῦ πρὸς δόξαν θεοῦ μόνου.

Τ άξις ἀρίστη τοῦ παντὸς ἀρχομένου
< καὶ> τελειοῦντος πᾶν ἔργον τε καὶ ῥήμα
θεὸν ποιεῖσθαι τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τὸ τέλος.[305]

[305] This stanza appears to be a direct reference to the first canon of the Council of Trullo, which in turn, refers to Gregory of Nazianzus, who was drawing upon Demosthenes. I am deeply indebted to John Burke for helping with this stanza.

On Monastics

He is a monastic who has only himself.
He is a monastic who has a single-thought[306] life.
The monastic having earthly cares
has been called many things, but not monastic.
A monastic's life is lighter than a bird's.
A monastic's life is without curiosity.
A monastic's life is altogether peaceful.
A monastic's life is absolutely undisturbed.
A monastic's life is always in stillness.[307]
He is a monastic who has a disciplined tongue.
He is a monastic whose eye does not wander.
He is a monastic who has a firmly planted nous.[308]
A monastic is a door that is not ajar.
A monastic is steadfastness for the weak
A monastic is a book of empirical study[309]
Showing the types and at the same time teaching.
The life of a monastic is a lamp bringing light to all.
The life of a monastic is a guide to those wandering.
The life of a monastic is a banisher of demons.
The life of a monastic is a courtier of angels.
The life of a monastic is only for the glory of God.

The best order of things for everyone beginning
or ending any deed or speech
is to make God the beginning and the end.

[306] *Logismos* (thought) does not refer to the cognitive process, but rather to the notion of suggestions to the spiritual center of a person.

[307] The term *hesychia* refers to an interior spiritual state, rather than external conditions.

[308] Although often translated as "mind," the monastic usage refers to the innermost part of the soul.

[309] *Kathistoron* likely uses *kata* in its emphatic sense, with *historia* referring to "knowledge by means of inquiry," so "empirical study" seems an appropriate rendering.

Τί εἶναι μοναχός;

Σήμερον ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ
καὶ αὔριον ἐν τῷ ταφῳ:--
μνήμη θανάτον, χρησιμεύει τῷ βίῳ.

Μοναχός ἐστί νοῦς ἡγνισμένος
καὶ κεκαθαρμένον στομα.[310]

Μοναχός ἐστί τάξις καὶ κατάστασις
ἀσωμάτων ἐν σώματι ὑλικῷ
καὶ ῥυπαρῷ ἐκτελουμένη.[311]

Μοναχός ἐστίν, ἄγγελος επίγειος ἐξόχως
τε καὶ κυρίως καὶ ἄνθρωπος οὐράνιος.

Μοναχός ἐστίν, ὁ μένων ἄχρι τέλους
τῇ τε κακοπαθείᾳ καὶ τοῖς λυπροῖς,
εἴγε ἄχος ἐστί λύπη, ἀφωνίαν
ἐμποιοῦσα.

Μοναχός ἐστί, λήθη παντελὴς
καὶ ἀναισθησία τῶν κἀταρθουμένων.

Μοναχός ἐστίν, οἶκος Θεοῦ, καθέδρα
βασιλική, παλάτιον τῆς ἁγίας Τριάδος.

Μοναχός ἐστίν, ἀπόκρυφος νοῦς.

Μοναχός ἐστί κιθάρα πνεθματική ὄργανον
ἀνακρουόμενον ἐμμελῶς.

[310] This stanza clearly refers to *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* 1.10: Μοναχός ἐστίν, ἡγνισμένος σῶμα καὶ κεκαθαρμένον στομα καὶ πεφωτισμένος νοῦς.

[311] This stanza is a verbatim quotation from *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* 1.10.

What is a Monastic?

Today in the world
and tomorrow in the grave:--
remember death, make use of [it] unto life.

He is a monk who has a hallowed nous
and a cleansed mouth.

A monk is one who has attained to the rank and status
of the bodiless ones
in a body material and foul.

A monk is, preeminently and authoritatively,
an angel on the earth and a celestial man

A monk is the one remaining firmly planted
in speechlessness up to the end in both
distress and also in painful things
if the anguish is [merely] physical.

A monk is one who has the complete forgetting
of and insensitivity to accomplishments.

A monk is an abode of God, a throne
of the King, a palace of the Holy Trinity.

A monk is one who has a concealed nous.

A monk is a spiritual stringed instrument[,] an organ
melodiously plucked.

Μοναχός ἐστί, πάλη σαρκός, κατά τὸ
εἰρημένον, οὐκ ἔστιν ἡμῖν ἡ πάλη
πρὸς αἷμα καὶ σάρκα νόει τὸ ῥητὸν
καὶ μὴ παράτρεχε τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ
πολλῆς δεῖται τῆς προσοχῆς.

Μοναχός ἐστίν, ὃς οὐ φοβεῖται τὸν Θεόν,
ἀλλ᾽ ἀγαπᾷ αὐτόν ἡ γὰρ τελεία
ἀγάπη ἔξω ῥίπτει τὸν φόβον.

Μοναχός ἐστί, νεκρὸς περιπατῶν.

Μοναχός ἐστί, θνῆσις ἑκούσιος κόσμου.

Μοναχός ἐστίν ἐκεῖνος, ὁ ἀεὶ ἀναβάσεις
ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ διατιθέμενος.[312]

Μοναχός ἐστίν, ἑκούσιος δίψα, μόνα
διψῶν τὰ οὐράνια καὶ πρὸς τὰ
μέλλοντα χάριτι τοῦ Παναγάθου Θεοῦ
τὸν νοῦν ἐντεῦθεν ἀγάπας. Ξένην
δεῖ ἑορτὴν ὁ τοιοῦτος πανηγυρίζει
τε καὶ ἑορτάζει μακάριος ὁ τούτου
τυχών ἐκεῖνος μόνος οἶδεν ἑτέρους
δειδάξαι τε καὶ φωτίσαι καὶ πρὸς
τὴν βασιλείαν καθοδηγῆσαι ἐν Χριστῷ
Ἰησοῦ τῷ Κυρίῳ ἡμῶν, μεθ᾽ ὅν τῷ
Πατρὶ σὺν ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι.

Μοναχός ἐστί φιλία νηστείας ἔχθρα τῶν ἡδωνῶν.[313]
Μοναχός ἐστί, μῖσος παθῶν, ἀγάπη καλῶν
Μοναχός ἐστίν, εὖχος χριστιανῶν.

[312] Ps 83:6 (LXX), which reads: ἀναβάσεις ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ διέθετο.
[313] This is clearly a misspelling of ἡδονῶν.

To be a monk is a struggle of the flesh,
according to the saying, "for us the struggle
is not against blood and flesh." Be mindful of the word[314]
and do not go beyond for this also
is in much need of attention.

A monk is not he who fears God,
but loves him for "perfect
love casts out fear."

A monk is a living corpse.

To be a monk is a voluntary death to the world.

A monk is that one who ever distributes[315]
ascents in the heart.

A monk is one with a voluntary thirst, thirsting
after only the things of heaven and with a view to
the things destined according to the grace of
the love of the All-Good God
The nous is lifted thence. Such a one eats the strange feast,
celebrates and keeps festival; this one is blessed. Only such a
one
experiencing this knows [how] to teach, enlighten, and to lead
others
to the kingdom in Christ
Jesus, our Lord, Who is with
the Father together with the Holy Spirit.

A monk is a love of fasting, enmity of pleasures.
A monk is hatred of the passions, love of the things good and
noble.
A monk is the boast of Christians.

[314] I interpret Kassia's use of the term *rhêton* here as a reference to a monastic elder's "word," as seen in the Desert Fathers.
[315] The verb *diatithêmi* suggests arrangement according to will.

APPENDIX 2: BYZANTINE CHRONICLES FOR RECONSTRUCTING KASSIA'S LIFE

Since there is no *Life* for Kassia, what little information is available comes to us largely in the form of short passages in annals. The authors' principle concern in these works was to report the history of the emperors. Thus, the only event from Kassia's life that interested the authors was her participation in the bride-show of Theophilos. Even then, Kassia's appearance is fleeting, for she serves primarily as a foil to illustrate their negative views of Theophilos. Nonetheless, these are valuable sources, because they give us some important details: Kassia was beautiful and noble; she was witty and clever; she founded a monastery with herself as abbess, during which time she continued writing compositions that were important enough that some of the authors even refer to a few by name.

What follows are relevant excerpts from these Byzantine chronicles, which, to my knowledge, have never before been available in English. Some of these texts have difficult passages, which could have different interpretations. Occasionally the renderings have been necessarily rather liberal in order to reflect the conventions of English. Again, I must express immense gratitude to the members of the Byzantine Studies listserv who offered their suggestions and interpretations on many of the obscure passages.

SYMEON[316] THE LOGOTHETE, *CHRONOGRAPHIA* (10TH C.)

Ῥωμαίων Βασιλεὺς Θεόφιλος ὁ υἱὸς Μιχαὴλ τοῦ Τραυλοῦ Εἰκονομάχος, ἔτη ιβ'

α'. Κόσμου ἔτος, ϛτκγ', τῆς θείας σαρκώσεως ἔτος ωκγ', Ῥωμαίων βασιλεὺς Θεόφιλος ὁ υἱὸς Μιχαὴλ τοῦ Τραυλοῦ, Εἰκονομάχος, ἔτη ιβ'. Τῆς δὲ μητρὸς αὐτοῦ Εὐφροσύνης βουληθείσης δοῦναι αὐτῷ γυναῖκα, ἄγει κόρας διαφόρους ἀσυγκρίτους τῷ κάλλει, μεθ' ὧν μία τις ἐξ αὐτῶν κόρη ὡραιοτάτη ὑπῆρχεν Εἰκασία λεγομένη καὶ ἑτέρα Θεοδώρα ὀνομαζομένη. Τούτῳ δοῦσα ἡ μήτηρ χρυσοῦν μῆλον εἶπεν δοῦναι τῇ ἀρεσάσῃ αὐτῷ. Ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς Θεόφιλος τῷ κάλλει τῆς Εἰκασίας ἐκπλαγεὶς ἔφη, ὡς *Ἆρα διὰ γυναικὸς ἐῤῥύη τὰ φαῦλα.* Ἡ δὲ μετ' αἰδοῦς πως ἀντέφησεν · *Ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ γυναικός πηγάζει τὰ κρείττονα.* Ὁ δὲ τῷ λόγῳ τὴν καρδίαν πληγεὶς ταύτην μὲν εἴασεν, Θεοδώρᾳ δὲ τὸ μῆλον ἀπέδωκεν, ὄυσῃ ἐκ Παφλαγονίας. Καὶ στέφονωται ἀμφότεροι ἔν τῷ εὐκτηρίῳ τοῦ ἁγίου Στεφάνου ὑπὸ Ἀντῤνίου πατριάρχου τῇ ἁγίᾳ Πεντηκοστῇ, κἀκεῖθεν ἔρχεται ἐν τῇ Μεγάλῃ ἐκκλησίᾳ, φιλοτιμησάμενος χρήμασι πολλοῖς τόν τε πατριάρχην καὶ τὸν κλῆρον ἅμα τῇ συγκλήτῳ. Καὶ ἡ μὲν Εἰκασία τῆς βασιλείας ἀποτυχοῦσα μονὴν κατεσκεύασεν, εἰς ἣν καὶ ἀποκειραμένη φιλοσόφῳ βίῳ καὶ Θεῷ ἀρέσκοντι διετέλεσε μέχρι τελευτῆς αὐτῆς, πολλὰ ἴδια συγγράμματα αὐτῆς καταλιποῦσα · ἡ δὲ τοῦ βασιλέως μήτηρ Εὐφροσύνη ἑκουσίως κατελθοῦσα τοῦ παλατίου ἐν τῇ μονῇ τῶν Γαστρίων ἡσύχασεν.[317]

[316] More properly, the author should be called Pseudo-Symeon or Symeon Continuatus because these parts of the chronicle appear to have been written by someone adding to the original work.

[317] PG 109:685C.

The Emperor of the Romans Theophilos, the son of Michael the Stutterer the Iconoclast, 12 years.

1. In the year of the world 6323, the year 823 from the divine Incarnation, the Emperor of the Romans Theophilos, the son of Michael the Stutterer, the Iconoclast, [reigned] 12 years. His mother Euphrosyne wanting to give him a wife, brought before him various maidens of incomparable beauty, among whom was a certain maiden in the flower of beauty called Eikasia[318] and another named Theodora. His mother, having given to him a golden apple, told him to give it to her who was pleasing to him. And the emperor Theophilos, smitten by the beauty of Eikasia, declared [to her]: "Now through [a] woman were trickled forth the baser things." With modesty, she retorted thus: "But also through [a] woman gush forth the better things." He was cut to the quick[319] by the response, put her aside, and instead gave the apple to Theodora, who was from Paphlagonia. And both [of them] having been crowned in the church of St. Stephen by Antony the patriarch on Holy Pentecost, processed to the Great Church (his having liberally contributed much money, the patriarch, and the clergy immediately effected the union). Meanwhile Eikasia, failing to become empress, instead built a monastery, where she was tonsured to the philosophic life. Continuing in repentance to God until her death, she left behind many of her original compositions. The emperor's mother Euphrosyne voluntarily went down from the palace to the Monastery of Gastria to live in stillness.

[318] Eikasia is one of the variations on Kassia's name.

[319] Literally, "struck in the heart," but the rendering here conveys the idiomatic sense.

GEORGE THE MONK, *CHRONIKON* 4.264 (11TH C.)

ΣΞΔ΄. Βασιλεία Θεοφίλου

Θεόφιλος ἐβασίλευσεν ἔτη ιβ΄, ὁ νέος Βαλτάσαρ, καὶ παραβάτης, καὶ θεομισὴς, καὶ τῶν ἁγίων εἰκόνων ὑβριστὴς, καὶ καθαιρέτης, καὶ βέβηλος.

Ἡ δὲ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ Εὐφροσύνη, ἀποστείλασα ἐν πασι τοῖς θέμασιν ἤγαγε κόρας εὐπροσώπους πρὸς τὸ νυμφοστολῆσαι Θεόφιλον, τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς · ἀγαγοῦσα δὲ ταύτας ἐν τῷ παλατίῳ εἰς τὸν λεγόμενον Μαργαρίτου τρίκλινον, δέδωκε τῷ Θεοφίλῳ χρυσοῦν μῆλον εἰποῦσα · << Ἦν δὲ τις ἂν ἀρεσθῇς ἐπίδος τοῦτο αὐτῇ. >> Ἦν δὲ τις ἐξ εὐγενῶν ἐν αὐταῖς κόρη ὀνόματι Εἰκασία ὡραιοτάτη πάνυ, ἣν ἰδὼν Θεόφιλος καὶ ὑπεραγασθεὶς αὐτὴν τοῦ κάλλους ἔφη · << Ὡς ἄρα διὰ γυναικὸς ἐῤῥύη τὰ φαῦλα! >> Ἡ δὲ μετ᾽ αἰδοῦς πως ἀντέφησεν · << Ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ γυναικὸς πηγάζει τὰ κρείττονα. >> Ὁ δὲ τῷ λόγῳ τὴν καρδίαν πληγεὶς, ταύτην μὲν εἴασε, Θεοδώρᾳ δὲ τὸ μῆλον ἐπέδωκεν οὔσῃ ἐκ Παφλαγόνων. Στέφει Θεοδώραν ἐν τῷ εὐκτηρίῳ Ἁγίου Στεφάνου, στεφθεὶς καὶ αὐτὸς ἅμα αὐτῇ ὑπὸ Ἀντωνίου πατριάρχου καὶ τῷ τοῦ γάμου καὶ τῆς βασιλείας στέφει τῇ ἁγίᾳ Πεντεκοστῃ · κἀκεῖθεν προῆλθεν ἐν τῇ Μεγάλῃ ἐκκλησίᾳ, φιλοτιμησάμενος χρήμασι πολλοῖς τὸν πατριάρχην ἅμα τῷ κλήρῳ καὶ τῇ συγκλήτῳ. Ἡ δὲ εἰρημένη Εἰκασία, τῆς βασιλείας ἀποτυχοῦσα, μονὴν κατεσκεύασεν, εἰς ἣν καὶ ἀποκειραμένη, ἀσκοῦσα καὶ φιλοσοφοῦσα, τῷ Θεῷ μόνῃ ζῶσα διατέλεσε μέχρι τέλους ζωῆς αὐτῆς · ἥ καὶ συγγράμματα αὐτῆς πλεῖστα καταλέλοιπε, τὸ <<Κύριε, ἡ ἐν πολλαῖς ἁμαρτίαις, >> καὶ τοῦ μεγάλου Σαββάτου τὸ τετραῴδιον · <<Ἄφρων γηραλέε, >> καὶ ἄλλα τινά.[320]

[320] PG 110:1008B.

264, The Reign of Theophilos

Theophilos reigned 12 years, the new Baltasar,[321] both a transgressor and also a hater of God, an insolent[322] man toward the holy icons, being both a destroyer and also a profaner.

His mother Euphrosyne, having sent off into all the themes, escorted pretty maidens before her son, Theophilos, as a bride-show. Leading these maidens into the palace called the Triclinum of the Pearl, she gave Theophilos a golden apple saying, "Give this to her whom you choose." There was a certain maiden from the nobility among them named Eikasia, who was altogether beautiful. Seeing her, Theophilos was delighted by[323] her immeasurable beauty and declared, "Through woman trickled forth the baser things!" And with modesty she retorted, "But also through woman gush forth the better things." And he, being cut to the quick by this statement, put her aside and instead gave the apple to Theodora, who was from Paphlagonia. He crowned Theodora in the church of St. Stephen; together they were crowned by Anthony the patriarch with the crowns of both marriage and of the empire on Holy Pentecost. From there they processed to the Great Church, where loving honor [he gave] much money at once to the patriarch, the clergy and the court. For her part Eikasia, failing to attain the queenship, established a monastery, where she was tonsured. She practiced asceticism and philosophy[324], and continued living only for God until the end of her life; she has bequeathed her many compositions: "Lord, the woman in many sins" and the Tetraodion of Great and Holy Saturday, "Senseless, old," and some others.[325]

[321] Baltasar is the Greek form of the name Belsarrausur, the son of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 5, who profaned the sacred vessels of the Jewish Temple and was condemned by a mystical hand writing on the wall.

[322] The Greek term connotes a violent disposition. Notably, it derives from the root hubris.

[323] The Greek verb indicates amazement.

[324] In Byzantine Greek, the term philosophy could refer to any intellectual activity generally. Monasticism was sometimes called the philosophic life.

[325] "Lord, the woman in many sins" is Kassia's best-known work, often called simply "The Hymn of Kassiani." Her Tetraodion Canon for Holy Saturday was later replaced by one written by Mark of Venice,

LEO THE GRAMMARIAN, *CHRONOGRAPHIA* (10TH/11TH C.)

Θεόφιλος ἐβασίλευσεν ἔτη ιβ΄. Ἡ δὲ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ Εὐφροσύνη ἀποστείλασα ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς θέμασιν ἤγαγεν κόρας εὐπρεπεῖς πρὸς τὸ νυμφοστολῆσαι Θεόφιλον τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς, ἀγαγοῦσα αὐτὰς ἐν τῷ παλατίῳ εἰς τὸν λεγόμενον Μαργαρίτην τρίκλινον, δέδωκα Θεόφιλῳ χρυσοῦν μῆλον εἰποῦσα, ὅτι εἰς ἣν ἀρεσθῇς ἐπίδος τοῦτο αὐτῇ. Ἦν δὲ τις ἐξ εὐγενῶν ἐν αὐταῖς κόρη ὀνόματι Ἰκασία ὡραιοτάτη πάνυ, ἣν ἰδὼν Θεόφιλος ὑπεραγασθείς αὐτὴν τοῦ κάλλους, ἔφη, ὡς ἄρα διὰ γυναικὸς ἐῤῥύη τὰ φαῦλα. Ἡ δὲ μετ᾽ αἰδοῦς πως ἀντέφη · Ἀλλὰ διὰ γυναικὸς πηγάζει τὰ κρείττονα. Ὁ δὲ τῷ λόγῳ τὴν καρδίαν πληγείς ταύτην μὲν εἴασεν, Θεοδώρᾳ δὲ τὸ μῆλον ἐπέδωκεν, οὔσῃ ἐκ Παφλαγόνων. Στέφει δὲ Θεοδώραν ἐν εὐκτρίῳ τοῦ ἁγίου Στεφάνου, στεφθεὶς καὶ αὐτὸς ἅμα αὐτῇ ὑπὸ Ἀντωνίου πατριάρχου τῇ ἁγίᾳ Πεντηκόστῃ προῆλθεν ἐν τῇ ἁγίᾳ Ἐκκλησίᾳ τῇ Μεγάλῃ, φιλοτιμησάμενος χρήμασι πολλοῖς τὸν πατριάρχην, ἅμα τῷ κλήρῳ τε καὶ τῇ συγκλήτῳ. Καὶ ἡ μὲν εἰρημένη Ἰκασία τῆς βασιλείας ἀποτυχοῦσα μονὴν κατεσκεύασεν, εἰς ἣν ἀποκειραμένη, ἀσκοῦσα, καὶ φιλοσοφοῦσα, καὶ Θεῷ μόνῳ ζῶσα διετέλεσεν μέχρι τέλους ζωῆς αὐτῆς · ἥ καὶ συγγράμματα αὐτῆς πλεῖστα καταλέλοιπεν.[326]

though her original *eirmoi* were retained. The third composition mentioned here was originally part of Kassia's contribution to the first ode Tetraodion Canon for Holy Saturday. It was later replaced, but Tripolitis provides the text on 80 and 81.

[326] PG 108:1046A-B.

Theophilos reigned for twelve years. His mother Euphrosyne, having sent out into all the themes, presented pretty maidens to her son Theophilos in the bride-show. Summoning them to the palace called the Triclinum of the Pearl, she gave Theophilos a golden apple saying that he should give it to her who pleased him. There was among them noble maiden named Ikasia, who was altogether beautiful. Beholding her, he was smitten by her beauty and straightaway he said, "Through a woman trickled forth the baser things." And with modesty she answered, "But through a woman gush forth the better things." He was cut to the quick by this answer and set her aside, and instead gave the apple to Theodora, who was from Paphlagonia. He crowned Theodora in the Church of St. Stephen. He himself was crowned to her[327] at once by the Patriarch Anthony on Holy Pentecost, and processed to the Great Church, where, loving honor, he at once endowed with much money the patriarch, the clergy and the council. And the aforementioned Ikasia, having failed to attain the queenship, established a monastery, in which she, having been tonsured, practiced asceticism, and also philosophized, continued living for God alone until the end of her life; she also has left behind many of her own compositions.

[327] A reference to the wedding crowns used in the Byzantine wedding ceremony.

JOHN ZONARAS, *CHRONIKON* (12TH C.)

Γυναῖκα δ' ἑαυτῷ εἰσοικίσασθαι βουληθεὶς ὁ Θεόφιλος, πολλὰς πολλαχόθεν ὡραίας κόρας συνήγαγεν, ἐν αἷς καὶ ἡ Εἰκασία, παρθένος καὶ τὸ εἶδος καλὴ καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ὑπερφέρουσα καὶ λόγοις ὡμιληκυῖα καὶ τὸ γένος ἐπίσημος. Περιήει γοῦν ταύτας θεώμενος καὶ μῆλον κατέχων χρυσοῦν, ἵν' αὐτὸ ἐπιδῷ τῇ δοξάσῃ αὐτῷ ἀρεστῇ · ἐπεὶ δὲ ἦλθε κατὰ τὴν Εἰκασίαν περιών, θαυμάσας ἐκείνην τῆς ὡραιότητος ἔφη ἐκ γυναικὸς ἐῤῥύη τὰ φαῦλα. ἡ δ' ἠρέμα καὶ μετὰ σεμνοῦ ἐρυθήματος εὐστόχως πως ἀπεκρίνατο ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ γυναικὸς πηγάζει τὰ κρείττω. ὁ δὲ καταβροντηθεὶς ὥσπερ τῷ τῆς παρθένου λόγῳ τὴν μὲν παρῆλθε, τὸ μῆλον δὲ χρυσοῦν τῇ ἐκ Παφλαγονίας Θεοδώρᾳ παρέσχετο. ἡ δὲ Εἰκασία τῆς βασιλείας ἀποτυχοῦσα μονὴν ἐδείματο, ἡ τὴν ἐκείνης κλῆσιν ἔσχεν ἐπίκλησιν, καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ μονάσασα ἑαυτῇ ἔζη καὶ τῷ Θεῷ, τῆς λογικῆς παιδείας μὴ ἀλογήσασα. ὅθεν καὶ συγγράμματα ἐκείνης εὑρίσκονται εὐπαιδευσίας χαρίτων οὐκ ἄμοιρα. καὶ ἡ μὲν οὕτω διέθετο τὰ καθ' ἑαυτὴν καὶ ἀτευκτήσασα βασιλέως φθαρτοῦ τῷ παμβασιλεῖ ἑαυτὴν ἐμνηστεύσατο καὶ ἀντὶ γεηρᾶς βασιλείας τὴν ἐπουράνιον ἐκληρώσατο.[328]

[328] Joannis Zonarae, *Epitome Historiarum* Libri XIII-XVIII, ed. Th. Büttner-Wobst (Bonn: 1897), 354, f.; quoted in Rochow, 7-8

Theophilos wanted to settle himself down with a woman, so he assembled many beautiful maidens from many places, among whom was Eikasia, both a virgin and also beautiful to behold, and she also stood out among those remaining, both by her eloquence and by her distinguished birth. He was walking around looking at them and he held a golden apple, in order that he might give it to her whom he found pleasing; he came to the surpassing Eikasia, and then amazing that most-beautiful one he said, "From a woman trickled forth the baser things." Calmly and blushing with solemnity, she wittily replied, "But also through a woman gush forth the better things." He was immediately thunderstruck by the statement of the virgin and he left her and offered the golden apple to Theodora from Paphlagonia. And Eikasia failing to attain the queenship built a monastery, which retained her name and in which she devoted herself to monasticism and to God, but she did not abandon her secular education. Wherefore her writings are not without the charms of a good education. And so she conducted her affairs in this manner: having failed to obtain the king of a perishable kingdom she was allotted a heavenly kingdom instead of an earthly one.

MICHAEL GLYKAS, *CHRONOGRAPHIA* (12TH C.)

Μετὰ δὲ τὸν Μιχαὴλ Θεόφιλος ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, ἔτη ιβ΄, μῆνας γ΄. καὶ τηνικαῦτα ἐκλογὴν ποιεῖται κορασίων, ὧν μία καὶ ἡ Κασία, ἣν δὴ καὶ ἀποπέμπεται διὰ τὴν πλήρη συνέσεως ἀπόκρισιν αὐτῆς · μῆλον γὰρ ἐπιδεδωκὼς αὐτῇ ὡς ἐρασθεὶς δῆθεν ἐπὶ τῷ κάλλει αὐτῆς καὶ εἰπών ἐκ γυναικὸς ἐρρύη τὰ φαῦλα, ἤκουσεν ἐξ αὐτῆς ὅτι καὶ ἀπὸ γυναικὸς πηγάζει τὰ κρείττονα, ἐφ᾽ ᾧ καὶ τὴν Παφλαγόνα Θεοδώραν ἠγάγετο.[329]

After Michael his son Theophilos, [reigned] 12 years and 3 months. He himself made a choice from among maidens, one of whom was Kasia, who, furthermore, was dismissed because of her extremely witty answer; for he intended to bestow the apple on her because he greatly desired[330] her beauty. But he said, "From a woman the baser things trickled forth." He heard her say that from a woman the better things gush forth, which led him to Theodora of Paphlagonia.

[329] Michaelis Glycae, *Annales*, rec. I, Bekkerus. Bonnae, 1836, 535f; see Rochow, 8.

[330] The verb here suggests lustful desire.

THE PATRIA OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Ἡ μονὴ τὰ Εἰκασίας ἐκτίσθη παρὰ Εἰκασίας μαναχῆς εὐλαβεστάτης καὶ σεβασμίας γυναικὸς ὡραίας τῷ εἴδει · ἣν δὴ κοσμικὴν οὖσαν Θεόφιλος ὁ βασιλεὺς ἰδὼν λαβεῖν γυναῖκα ἠθέλησεν, εἰπὼν ὡς ἄρα διὰ γυναικὸς ἐρρύη τὰ φαῦλα. Ἐπεὶ δ᾽ ἐκείνη σοφωτάτη ἦν, μετ᾽ αἰδοῦς πως ἀντέφησεν · ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ γυναικὸς πηγάζει τὰ κρείττονα. Ταῦτα ἀκούσας ὁ Θεόφιλος ταύτην μὲν εἴασε, Θεοδώρᾳ δὲ ὃ ἐπεφέρετο χρυσοῦν μῆλον δεδώκει. Ἡ οὖν Εἰκασία τῆς βασιλείας ἀποτυχοῦσα τὸ τῶν μοναζουσῶν ἐνδιδύσκεται σχῆμα, κανόνας πολλοὺς καὶ στιχηρὰ καὶ ἄλλα τινὰ ἀξιοθαύμαστα ποιήσασα.[331]

The monastery of Eikasia was founded by Eikasia the most-pious nun and most-revered woman, beautiful to behold; seeing her in the world,[332] the Emperor Theophilos desired to take her as wife, saying to her, "Through a woman the trickled forth the baser things." Whereupon that most-wise woman with modesty answered, "But also through a woman gush forth the better things." Hearing this, Theophilos set her aside and gave the golden apple to Theodora. Then Eikasia, failing to obtain the queenship, put on the schema[333] of the monastics, composing many canons and *stichera* and other things worthy of wonder.

[331] *Scriptore Originum Constantinopolitanarum* red. Th. Praeger, 2, Lipsiae, 1907, 276; see Rochow, 9.

[332] The implication here is that this took place before she became a nun.

[333] In Byzantine monastic tradition, the schema could refer to an advanced monastic rank, although the term is sometimes used more generally to refer to the spiritual and ascetical life.

EPHRAIM THE MONK, *CHRONIKON* (14TH C.)

Θεόφιλος σχεῖν σύζυγον βίου θέλων
κοινωνὸν ἅμα τοῦ κράτους καὶ τοῦ λέχους,
χορὸν συνῆξε παρθένων πολλαχόθεν,
καλῶν ἁπασῶν, ὄψιν εὐπρεπεστάτων.
ἐν αἷσπερ ἐξελάμψε τῶν ἄλλων πλέον,
οἷος σελήνης πλησιφαοῦς τις κύκλος.
σώματος ὥρᾳ, λαμπρότητι τοῦ γένους
καὶ μαρμαρυγαῖς τῶν λόγων Εἰκασία.
χρυσοῦν τι μῆλον ἀμέλει φέρων ἄναξ
περιπολῶν ἦν τὸν χορὸν τῶν παρθένων,
μνῆστρον σκοπῶν δοῦναί τι τοῦτο φιλτάτῃ.
ὡς οὖν θεᾶται παριὼν Εἰκασίαν,
κάλλους περιττοῦ θαυμάσας κόρην ἔφη
διὰ γυναικὸς παῦλα πάντ᾽ ἀπερρύη.
ἡ δ᾽ ἠρέμ᾽ ἀντέφησεν εὐστόχως ἄγαν
ἀλλ᾽ ἐκ γυναικὸς πηγάζει καὶ βελτίω.
ὁ δ᾽ αὖ παρῆλθε θαυμάσας τὴν παρθένον,
καὶ δοὺς τὸ μῆλον παρθένῳ Θεοδώρᾳ,
χώραν ἐχούσῃ πατρίδα Παφλαγόνων,
πλὴν εὐπατριδῶν πατέρων κατηγμένῃ,
κοινωνὸν αὐτὴν ἄγεται κράτους λέχους,
τὴν Εἰκασίαν παραβλέψας, ὡς ἔφην.
ἣ μὴ τυχοῦσα κομικῆς σκηπτουχίας
οὐ νυμφίου τε γηγενοῦς βασιλέως
πλουτεῖ νοητὸν παντάνακτα νυμφίον
καὶ βασιλέως οὐρανῶν κληρουχίαν,
μονάσασα δὲ καὶ μονὴν δειμαμένη
ἠσκεῖτ᾽ ἐν αὐτῇ, προσλαλοῦσα ταῖς βίβλοις ·
ἧς μεστὰ συγγράμματα χαρίτων ἔφυ.[334]

[334] Ephraimii Monachi Imperatorum et Patriarchum Recensus Intrerete, A Maio. Bonnae 1840, 103f., see Rochow, 8-9.

Theophilos desired to have a life's yoke-mate
a partner at the same time of his power and of his marriage-bed,
he assembled a chorus of virgins from many places,
every one of them beautiful, a most beautiful sight.
In this assembly one shone more than the others,
the full moon alone shines near as bright,
given her physical beauty,[335] the splendor of the family
and the flashing[336] words of Eikasia.
The lord carrying a golden apple heedlessly
inspected the chorus of the virgins, considering
which was most dear to give this as a token of betrothal.
Then he beheld Eikasia at hand,
wondering at her extraordinary beauty, he said,
"Through a woman all baser things arose."
But she calmly and too cleverly[337] answered,
"And yet out of a woman also gushes forth improvement."
He passed on by, wondering at the virgin,
and gave the apple to the virgin Theodora,
whose had ancestors from the land of Paphlagonia,
though she was of good and noble ancestry,
As a partner she gained power through child-bearing.
He despised[338] Eikasia, or so it is said.

[335] Literally, "in the time of her body." The Greek implies an etymological link between the terms beauty (ὡραίος) and time (ὥρα). Thus, Ephraim indicates that Kassia was at a perfect age and beauty. The suggestion that Kassia was in the "ripeness of body" need not be as lewd in context as it seems in modern English, considering Byzantine laws regarding marriage and the emphasis on producing an imperial heir.

[336] The term in Greek has a double-implication. On the one hand, it indicates beauty and on the other hand, it suggests something that is very quick.

[337] "Too cleverly," or literally, "too much well-aimed."

[338] Ephraim may have intentionally used a Greek verb with obscure meaning. In addition to the meaning given here, it could also suggest that the emperor eyed Kassia with suspicion, a reading supported by Kassia's obvious Iconophile partisanship and also a few of her compositions that may have had jibes directed at him. Yet another possibility is that he looked at her out of the corner of his eye, i.e., with lust, suggesting that

She did not succeed in bearing a worldly staff[339]
neither a husband nor an earthly king,
[but obtained instead] noetic riches and an omnipotent Bridegroom,
and an allotment from the King of the Heavens,
living the monastic life and even constructing a monastery
practiced asceticism in it, expounding to the nuns on the books;[340]
she produced compositions full of grace.

Ephraim was familiar with the legend of Theophilos' continued pursuit of Kassia, even after she entered the monastery (associated with a verse in the Hymn of Kassiani).

[339] In addition to referring to a royal scepter, the context also evokes the staff of authority borne by an abbess.

[340] This is a particularly difficult phrase. Another reasonable interpretation would be that Kassia's speech was consonant with what is "in the books." The identity of the "books" is equally vague; it probably refers to Scripture and the writings of the Church Fathers, but it could include classical writers as well.

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